

Norris, William Edward

A bachelor's blunder in 2 vol

Bd.: 2

1887

P.o.angl. 251 at-2/3

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11664750-4

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A BACHELOR'S BLUNDER BY W. E. NORRIS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A
BACHELOR'S BLUNDER

BY
W. E. NORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "MY FRIEND JIM," ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1887.

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A
BACHTELOR'S BLUNDER

W. E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF "MY FRIEND JIM" ETC. ETC.

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A BACHELOR'S BLUNDER.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW WORDS FROM LADY CHATTERTON.

IF there is no rule without an exception, *a fortiori* there can be no exception without a rule. The fact, therefore, that Captain Cunningham was repeatedly congratulated upon his exceptional good fortune in being able to spend the best part of his time in London while he was still quartered at Windsor should be sufficient to show that his brother-officers were not equally favoured, and to clear his battalion from a hasty charge of ornamental idleness. Not, of course, that any such accusation would ever be made, except by quite an ignorant person; but in these days there are so many ignorant and officious persons about—persons who write to the papers, and ask questions in the House of Commons, and get Royal Commissions appointed, and generally harry and distress all who bear a shred of responsibility, till a poor overgrown nation is in danger of being driven to ruin by sheer terror of them—that it seems best to state, for the benefit of any such persons into whose hands these pages may fall, that officers in the Guards are not always permitted to neglect

their duties, and that Captain Cunningham's leisure was due to a lingering lameness, of which, perhaps, he made the most.

However, if the ignorant and officious ones had contented themselves with making ill-natured remarks about the branch of the service to which he belonged, nobody would have been very much the worse; but, unfortunately, they—or a section of them—took it into their heads to make remarks of another and a more personal kind about him, and not about him alone. When two young people (or even middle-aged people, for that matter) walk together, talk together, and sit out dances together perpetually, their conduct is pretty sure to call forth comments which are not likely to err on the side of excessive charity. It would be too much to say that Mrs. Herbert had made enemies since her arrival in London; but she was too beautiful, too rich, and too generally popular to escape detraction, and plenty of ladies were ready to giggle spitefully and whisper insinuations behind their fans when they saw her always closely attended by the same person.

Bertie ought to have known that this would be so, and possibly he did know it; but there must be limits to everybody's self-denial. He adhered strictly to his resolutions; he kept his hopeless passion to himself; twenty times a day he swallowed down indiscreet words which trembled upon his lips; but to renounce Hope's society altogether was a flight of heroism too lofty for him. What he would have been very glad to renounce was the society of Mrs. Pierpoint, and indeed, by dint of nimble dodging and doubling, he did contrive to accomplish this for a considerable time; but eventually, as was to be expected, that determined lady

caught him and pinned him down while she upbraided him in no measured terms.

"So much for your promises!" she exclaimed, in conclusion. "Another time I shall know better than to believe you."

"Now I should just like to know what promise I have broken," said Bertie, turning at bay. "I deny that I have broken anything, except my leg; and that I didn't do on purpose. Is it my fault if Miss Herbert has gone off to Yorkshire to bury an old woman who declines to die?"

"You ought to have followed her."

"Mrs. Pierpoint, you have no sense of decency. Would you have me thrust myself into the house of a dying lady whom I have never even seen, and attack her niece with my importunate offers of marriage under her very nose?"

"If you were in love with Carry, that is exactly what you would do, and you know it."

"But as I am not in love with Carry——"

"Oh, you choose to say that, but in reality you care just as much for her as you do for anybody. If you really cared for Mrs. Herbert, for instance, you would not go on as you have been doing for the last few weeks."

"I don't know what you mean," said Bertie placidly.

"I suppose not; my meaning is so obscure, isn't it? After all, I presume that she is aware of what she is about. Down in the country I liked her; I thought she seemed to be an innocent, inexperienced kind of woman. But now I am afraid she is no better than her neighbours. I don't mean to say that that is any excuse for you."

"You may say what you like about me," returned Bertie; "but I won't listen to any abuse of her. You are quite wrong about her; she doesn't know the meaning of the word flirtation, and she has no more flirted with me than you have. Of course a man mustn't venture to make a friend of a woman. Idiotic things are always said about them; we all know that. But I must say I didn't expect to hear such things from *you*."

"Do you really wish me to understand that you have no other feeling than friendship for Mrs. Herbert?"

"Certainly not; I have never tried to conceal the truth from you. I love her, and I loved her before she married, as you know; but you are the only person who does know it. I have never breathed a hint of it to her; though it is easy to see that her marriage has turned out unhappily, just as I told you it would. Herbert neglects her——"

"And you try to make up for his neglect by your disinterested friendship? What an excellent plan! If I am idiotic, as you politely insinuate, I think I know two people, not to say three, who are at least as much so. You will all have to suffer for it some day, if that is any comfort. I have a great mind to speak to Mrs. Herbert."

"Once upon a time," observed Bertie, "Lady Chatterton, in the overflowing kindness of her heart, thought it right to warn you that, unless you dropped your humble servant, your reputation would suffer. How grateful you were to her! And how promptly you acted upon her advice! Do you remember that little episode?"

"I remember it quite well," answered Mrs. Pierpoint good-humouredly. "Also I remember the Exhibition of 1851, and the Duke of Wellington's funeral.

You and Mrs. Herbert, I should say, can hardly remember the Prince of Wales's wedding. The cases, you see, are not quite parallel."

"You were ready to bite Old Chatty's head off, all the same," said Bertie.

This was undeniable; and Mrs. Pierpoint, who was a very sensible woman, could not but admit that any interference on her part was unlikely to be attended with happy results. She sighed, and said to herself that she had better hold her tongue. "And yet," she thought, "somebody ought to give her a hint."

Somebody was going to give her a hint. Somebody is always ready to undertake these unpleasant tasks, and on this occasion the duty was about to be assumed by no less a person than Lady Chatterton herself. Lady Chatterton, in her own estimation, as well as in that of the majority of her acquaintances, was a very great person indeed; and it may be added that the distinguished position which she occupied in society was due solely to her personal qualities. Of good family by birth, but belonging by marriage only to the lowest rank in the peerage; she had neither great wealth, nor commanding talents, nor even good manners; so that, to a superficial observer, it might seem as though she should have had some difficulty in making her house one of the most exclusive in London, and her good word eagerly sought after by all who wished to penetrate into the highest circles. It is true that what is rare is sure to be prized, and Lady Chatterton's good words were rare enough in all conscience; but it was to her self-assertion that she owed the plentitude of her power. Courage she must undoubtedly

have had; for there are very few people in the world who would dare to utter speeches half as rude as those which she was accustomed to fling right and left of her, with a twitch of her nose and a twinkle of her little colourless eyes. Those sayings of hers were retailed everywhere as capital jokes, although they were not particularly smart, and certainly not witty. Her successes were achieved by straight, knock-down blows, at which everybody laughed. The recipients of them often joined in the laughter, while inwardly wincing and trembling. It was agreed that Old Chatty was a privileged person, whose attacks might be submitted to without loss of self-respect. Most people hated her; but as nearly all also feared her, she was seldom paid back in her own coin, and very good care was taken not to call her "Old Chatty" when there was any danger of her sharp ears overhearing the nickname.

This formidable lady had deigned to bestow a good deal of notice upon Mrs. Herbert. She was connected by ancient ties of friendship with Lady Jane Lefroy, who lived in abject terror of her, and she had said to her old friend: "Bring that niece of yours to see me. Isn't she the girl whom you cut out of her property, and then tried to start in life as a professional artist?"

Poor Lady Jane protested indignantly against this cruel calumny, but did as she was ordered; and Lady Chatterton was so kind as to say to Hope: "I think you will do. Of course you are aware that you are very handsome; but you do not appear to be conceited, and you conduct yourself with propriety, which is more than can be said for most of the young married women whom I meet nowadays." And then she sent her an

invitation to a ball, followed by one to a dinner-party, at which a member of the Royal family was present.

But these events had occurred early in the season. At a later period, Lady Chatterton saw reason to doubt whether the propriety of Mrs. Herbert's conduct had been maintained; and, as she had made herself to some extent responsible for the young bride, it was necessary that further inquiries should be instituted, and displeasure manifested should these prove unsatisfactory. One morning, therefore, Hope received the following note, scrawled upon a rather dirty half-sheet of paper—

“DEAR MRS. HERBERT,—If you are doing nothing particular to-morrow, come to luncheon here at two o'clock. I have something to say to you—Yours truly,
“ISABELLA CHATTERTON.”

Hope, having no other engagement, accepted this unceremonious invitation, little imagining why she had been sent for. Lady Chatterton lived in a large house in Belgrave Square; she had a husband who was not a very important personage, and sons and daughters who were not very important either. Hope found quite a large assemblage of them in the drawing-room when she entered, together with sundry other ladies and gentlemen to whom she was not introduced. Her hostess offered her a rigid hand, by way of greeting, and breathed out “How do you do?” in a fashion peculiar to herself—a sort of wheeze, accompanied by a glassy stare over the head of the person addressed. It was probably designed to check familiarity, and was indeed adapted to the achievement of that end. Plain-featured Miss Chatterton sidled up to the new-comer,

and engaged her in conversation. It struck Hope that she wore an air of commiseration for which there was no ostensible cause.

Presently the whole party moved downstairs to the dining-room, where a good deal of talk went on which was not very interesting to Hope, relating, as it did, to the domestic affairs of people whom she knew only by name. Judging by the remarks made about them, the domestic affairs of these unfortunates had not been managed with conspicuous success. They either had made, or were about to make, foolish marriages; they had been living far beyond their incomes, and were upon the verge of a smash; some of them, apparently, had got into still worse scrapes. The rather insignificant-looking and dowdily-dressed old lady at the head of the table contributed the principal items to this sum of tittle-tattle. She had a twitch in her face which increased when she spoke, and which gave her something of the appearance of a bull-terrier about to pounce upon a rat. Upon more than one of the company she did pounce suddenly and without provocation, causing them to pull wry faces; for, to do her justice, she was not a backbiter in the ordinary acceptation of the term, but was always ready to say as much evil of her friends in their presence as in their absence. Of Hope she took no notice at all until luncheon was over, when she stopped her in the hall, saying: "Come in here, please; I want to speak to you;" and so led the way into a small library on the ground-floor.

What was coming next Hope had no notion; but she could not help being amused at the coolness of her entertainer, who, after addressing her as if she had been a refractory housemaid, merely pointed to a chair,

and proceeded to open and read some letters which were lying on the table. The old lady did not hurry herself. She perused her letters deliberately, sat down and answered one of them, and then, as if she had suddenly recollected that there was somebody in the room, said: "Oh, Mrs. Herbert, yes. Well, Mrs. Herbert, I am sorry to say that I have heard some disagreeable reports about you."

"I am sorry, too," answered Hope, laughing a little; "but if they are disagreeable, perhaps you had better not repeat them to me."

Lady Chatterton glanced at her with a momentary curiosity. She was not accustomed to be met in that way. "But I must repeat them to you," she said. "That was why I told you to come here to-day, you know."

"Told me to come?" echoed Hope.

"Yes; I thought it would be kind to put you on your guard. You evidently know nothing of the world, and poor Jane Lefroy is far too great a fool to be of any use to you. I daresay you understand what I am alluding to."

"Not in the least," answered Hope staring.

"Oh! Well, I am told, and, indeed, I myself have noticed, that you are behaving foolishly with a Captain Cunningham. I know something of the young man, and what I know is by no means to his advantage; so that you would be wise, in any case, to drop his acquaintance. Of course, now that you and he have made yourselves talked about, you must give him his dismissal at once. That is, if you wish to keep your place in society, as I presume that you do."

Hope rose and drew herself up to her full height,

which was several inches above that of her accuser. "You may have meant well, Lady Chatterton," she said, with a slight tremor in her voice, which she was unable to control; "but I wish you had not thought fit to speak to me in this way. Captain Cunningham is an intimate friend of mine and of my husband's; and I certainly shall not dream of dropping his acquaintance because people have noticed that he and I are often together. And I do not believe that any one whose good opinion is worth having suspects me of—of—what you hint at."

Lady Chatterton did not seem to be offended. "Oh," she returned, with a sniff, and a twitch of her nose, "it is no use to take up *that* tone: you aren't in a position to do it. I grant you that if you were a great swell you might set the world at defiance to a certain extent, though I think that would be an undesirable and immoral proceeding even then; but you see you are not a great swell, and no one is likely to have mercy upon you—especially as you are so handsome. In point of fact, you will have to drop the man or be dropped yourself; there is no alternative. You may take my word for that, and I need hardly tell you that I have no motive but your own good for saying so."

The calm impudence of this speech was too much for Hope's dignity. "Then, Lady Chatterton," said she, "pray set a good example to the rest of the world by being the first to drop me. I am sure I am neither moral enough nor 'swell' enough to be fit for your society."

And with that she hastily left the room and the house, and was in her carriage—which, luckily, was waiting for her—before Lady Chatterton had recovered

from the amazement naturally aroused by so much audacity.

It was all very well to assume an air of audacity in Lady Chatterton's presence, but when that stimulus had been removed a reaction set in, and Hope felt much more ashamed than angry. In her eyes it was a terrible and disgraceful thing to be talked about as, according to that malignant old woman, people were talking about her; nor was conscious innocence quite enough to console her. She did not know whether to believe the statement or not, and, in her anxiety for more trustworthy information she told the coachman to drive to Eaton Square. "If it is true, Aunt Jane will know of it," she thought.

Lady Jane, who was at home and alone, threw up her hands in dismay when her niece somewhat incoherently described the scene which had just taken place.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, in accents of the most poignant distress, "how *could* you be so insane! To quarrel with Lady Chatterton, of all people in the world! You have made an enemy of her for life; she never forgives and never forgets."

"Is it my quarrelling with Lady Chatterton that seems to you the important thing?" asked Hope with a touch of scorn. "It doesn't seem so to me. What I want you to tell me is whether she was speaking the truth."

"Oh, well, perhaps she was; we can talk about that presently. I don't think you at all realise what you have done. Hope, dear, would you—could you—would you very much mind—going back and begging her pardon?"

Hope burst out laughing and then stopped abruptly. "I would rather be flayed alive," she said.

"Ah, my dear, that is so foolish—such mistaken pride! When we have done wrong, we ought not to be above acknowledging it. And you *will* be flayed alive—at least, it comes to much the same thing. You little know what that woman is! There is nothing so bad that she will hesitate to say it about you, after this."

"Let her say anything and everything that she likes. Don't you understand, Aunt Jane, that it is a matter of complete indifference to me what she may say?"

"But I thought you came here because you were not indifferent to what people say?" observed Lady Jane, with some plausibility.

Hope bit her lips. "Well," she resumed, after a pause, "do people say that—that—I am too much with Captain Cunningham?"

"If you ask me, I am afraid I must answer that they do. I had even thought of speaking a word or two to you about it; only you are so—so——"

"Pig-headed?"

"No—touchy. You must admit that you are rather touchy, Hope, and rather self-confident too. You always think that you know best; but at your age it is impossible that you should know best; and really it is neither prudent nor becoming to flirt so openly——"

"Do *you* believe that I ever flirted with Captain Cunningham, Aunt Jane?" interrupted Hope, her eyes growing large with indignation.

Lady Jane was a kind-hearted woman, after her own limited, selfish fashion. She was fond of her

niece and even proud of her, feeling that she had done credit to the family by her marriage. "No, dear," she answered gently; "not if you tell me that you didn't. But you see, it did look rather like it. I blame Dick a good deal."

"Dick is not in the least to blame," returned Hope quickly. "He doesn't have horrid thoughts and suspicions. If anybody is to be blamed, I suppose I am the one: I ought to have known that anything is believed rather than the truth."

Lady Jane sighed and rubbed her hook-nose. "Unhappily, that is the case," she agreed. "And since it is so," she added persuasively, "don't you think you owe Lady Chatterton an apology for your rudeness?"

But as Hope could by no means be brought to see her duty in this light, what did Lady Jane do, after dismissing her niece with some kindly words of caution and comfort, but order her carriage and drive off post-haste to Belgrave Square to cast herself at the feet of her friend and enemy. The reception that she met with was at once a joy and an astonishment to her.

"My good Jane," Lady Chatterton said, "if Mrs. Herbert were as great a coward as you are, I should certainly cut her; but, luckily for herself, she has plenty of spirit, and I like her all the better for it. Why you people put up with my insolence I can't imagine. *I* shouldn't if I were in your shoes; but probably you get no more than you deserve. Of course you will understand that I can't continue to know your niece unless she behaves herself: there have been far too many of these scandals of late years. But I am quite willing to let her have a second trial."

CHAPTER II.

A FEW WORDS FROM MR. LEFROY.

By a coincidence not more strange than one of those which so frequently lead two learned persons, living hundreds of miles apart, to hit upon the same invention at the same moment, Dick Herbert was being warned of the danger that threatened his domestic peace even while his wife was being similarly admonished. The slow, steady march of Science brings those who dog her steps to a point at which some fresh discovery is inevitable; the bud, growing and swelling by imperceptible degrees, at length bursts suddenly into the blossom; and the proof that Captain Cunningham's alleged flirtation with Mrs. Herbert had excited genuine scandal is that it ended, not only by moving a gossiping old woman like Lady Chatterton to remonstrance, but by causing so tolerant a philosopher as Mr. Lefroy to feel that he must either speak to one of the parties concerned or burst, like the bud.

To the first of these he was sure that it would be useless as well as undignified to speak; to the second it would be painful and perhaps also productive of ill-feeling—for there is never any telling in what spirit a woman will receive rational counsel; but the third, though odd in some ways, was at least a man of the world and would not be likely to resent a word in season. When, therefore, Mr. Lefroy chanced upon Dick Herbert, lunching all by himself in the club to which they both belonged, it seemed the best of good policy to sit down beside him and lead gently up to a

delicate subject. The difficulty was that Herbert was so abominably matter-of-fact and straightforward. Diplomacy was thrown away upon him, and even if he did understand what you were driving at, he would never admit as much until you had expressed your meaning in unequivocal language. Thus, after an hour of fruitless fencing and hinting, Mr. Lefroy, who by this time had accompanied his victim upstairs to the smoking-room, was forced to come to the point.

"You and I are old friends, Herbert," he began, "and I'm sure you won't take offence at what I am going to say. Don't you think that young fellow Cunningham is rather too often at your house?"

Dick blew a cloud of smoke, watched it drift upwards, and then answered succinctly, "No."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Lefroy, a little provoked by this phlegmatic reception of his attack, "other people think so, I can tell you."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. Now I am not given to interfering with my neighbours——"

"H'm!—I don't know," interpolated Dick; "I should have said you were rather inclined to be fussy and officious. Excuse my bluntness."

Good-natured Mr. Lefroy burst out laughing. "That isn't fair, Herbert, and you know it isn't," he returned. "Even the Prime Minister admits that I don't waste the time of the House. I never speak unless I have a good reason, and I say my little say briefly."

"Well, you have asked me briefly whether I don't think that Cunningham is too often at my house, and I have answered briefly that I don't. Doesn't that close the incident, as they say in the French Chamber?"

"Not quite; because, as I told you just now, other people think so, though you may not."

"I am not going to make myself responsible for the vain imaginings of other people."

"The question is whether they are vain. Of course I have no right to catechise you."

"None whatever."

"Oh, well, if you meet me in that way, I had better hold my tongue. I thought it would be friendly to try and open your eyes, that was all. If you like your wife's character to be taken away by a lot of old pussy-cats, there's no more to be said."

Dick's face changed slightly. He turned his head, and looked full at his interlocutor:

"Pussy-cats must be allowed to spit," he said; "there's no way of stopping them that I know of. But if you will tell me the name of any man who has taken my wife's character away, I'll undertake to stop *his* mouth."

"That's absurd," returned Mr. Lefroy, with an impatient gesture. "You can't thrash half the men of your acquaintance, and if you did you would only make matters worse. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*, and the more dust you kick up about an affair of that sort the dirtier you are apt to make your own coat."

"Perhaps you are right," said Dick, placidly, "I'll do nothing then."

"Upon my word, Herbert," exclaimed Mr. Lefroy, with a vexed laugh, "you are the most extraordinary fellow I ever met! Hang me if I understand you!"

"I doubt whether you do," observed Dick. "If you think that I am the kind of man to keep my wife under lock and key, you certainly don't understand me."

"My dear fellow, I never meant to suggest such strong measures; but surely you might give Cunningham a hint that his room would be more welcome than his company just at present. Or you might quietly shunt him, without saying a word."

"Thanks; that is excellent advice, no doubt; but it wouldn't quite suit me to follow it. I prefer to be open and above-board. If I thought that my wife was seeing too much of Cunningham, I should tell her what I thought. As I don't happen to think so, I shall not tell her any such thing. It's as simple a matter as that, you see."

Mr. Lefroy shook his head. "None so blind as those who won't see," he thought to himself, but refrained from giving verbal expression to this sentiment. Presently Dick, who had been reclining upon a couple of chairs, swung his long legs to the ground, assumed a more upright attitude, and laughed. "Don't look so injured, Lefroy," said he; "it's all right. You meant to do me a good turn; but it would be no earthly use for you and me to discuss questions of this kind together, because our point of view isn't the same. You have a pretty good general opinion of your fellow-creatures; you think they aren't a bad lot, taking them all round; only you wouldn't trust them much farther than you could see them. Well, that's one system; mine is different. I either trust people entirely or not at all—indeed, I can't very well help going upon that plan—and my wife is a person whom I trust entirely. Therefore it isn't likely that I should be afraid of her becoming too fond of another man."

Mr. Lefroy attempted to explain. Distrust of his niece was quite the last thing in the world that he

had intended to imply. He believed in her implicitly; but at the same time it was surely no insult to her to suggest that she was capable of doing imprudent things. Strangers could not be expected to know that she was as innocent as a child; scandal was more easily stirred up than laid; it was always unwise to defy the dowagers, etc., etc. Dick did not wait to hear the end of the harangue, but pushed his hat to the back of his head, stuck his umbrella under his arm, as his habit was, and lounged unceremoniously downstairs to the entrance of the club, where he stood for a few minutes, gazing down St. James's Street and ruminating.

By and by Mr. Francis, stepping briskly past, espied him, and called out: "Hullo, Herbert! what's the latest news of you?"

Dick descended to the pavement, hooked his arm into that of his friend, and accompanied him a few paces along the street. "Francis," said he, "I'm a little bit troubled in my mind."

"That does not surprise me," thought Mr. Francis to himself; but his only articulate comment was "Oh!"

"Yes; I'm not sure that I haven't made rather an ass of myself."

"Nor am I," thought Mr. Francis, as before. "Out with it, old man!" he said aloud encouragingly.

At the top of the street Dick came to a standstill, obstructing the traffic, while he held his friend at arm's length and stared at him fixedly. "On second thoughts," said he, with much deliberation, "I won't come out with it. No; not yet awhile—even to you. Some day, perhaps, I'll tell you what I was going to say. Good-bye."

And with that he turned, plunged across Piccadilly, and made straight for home.

"Poor old fellow!" soliloquised Mr. Francis, as he gazed after Dick's retreating form. "He might as well have relieved himself by making a full confession, for it's easy enough to guess his secret. Not that I could have given him much consolation. What has happened to him was morally bound to happen, and he has no one to thank for it but himself. All the same, I do hope and trust that that sweet youth will soon get tired of Mrs. Herbert and throw her over to somebody else. Nothing would afford me keener satisfaction than to see her going about with a pale face and all the outward signs of a broken heart." With which vindictive sentiment Mr. Francis went his way.

Dick, meanwhile, was making long strides towards Bruton Street. As chance would have it, he reached his house at the very moment when Hope, fresh from her interview with Lady Jane, was passing through the doorway. She was slightly flushed, and the hand which she laid upon her husband's arm trembled a little. "Dick," she said, as they ascended the stairs together, "do you like London?"

"Hate it!" answered Dick, laconically. "At least," he added, thinking that his statement required some qualification, "I don't mind it for a bit, you know. That is, I am quite contented to be here, so long as you are amusing yourself."

"I am not amusing myself!" cried Hope, vehemently; "I have had more than enough of London life; I am utterly sick of the whole thing! Dick," she added persuasively, after a moment, "suppose we were to go home at once?"

"What—back to Farndon?" asked Dick, somewhat startled.

"Why not, if we are both tired of this?"

"And how about all your engagements?"

"Oh, I don't think we need trouble ourselves about them. We can't be expected to keep engagements when we have left London."

"No; only it is usual to give some reason for disappearing in such a hurry."

By this time Dick was standing with his back against the mantelpiece in the back drawing-room, which had been converted into a sort of boudoir for Mrs. Herbert's especial use, and she was sitting in a low chair beside him. "Have you any particular reason for wishing to be off?" he asked, suddenly looking her full in the face.

Hope's eyelids dropped under his inquiring gaze and she felt the colour mounting into her cheeks. She had fully intended to tell him all that Lady Chatterton and Lady Jane had said to her; but now that it had come to the point, her courage failed her and she began to doubt the wisdom of such a course. She was quite uncertain as to how he would take the announcement that an unkind construction had been placed upon her intimacy with Bertie Cunningham. In many respects Dick was a riddle to her, and she sometimes fancied that beneath that *nonchalant* exterior there might lurk a capacity for wrath which it would be decidedly unpleasant to arouse. That he would blame her she did not believe; for he must know that she was incapable of the conduct attributed to her, and he certainly did not care enough about her to be jealous; but it was likely enough that he would blame

Bertie and that there would be a quarrel—perhaps a scene. And then of course the next thing would be that Carry would hear of what had happened; and so troubles without end would arise.

It was the rapid passage of these thoughts through her mind that caused her to blush, lower her eyes, and finally answer: "I should like a little rest after all this gaiety. Isn't that reason enough?"

She stole a quick glance at her husband after making this evasive speech, and she thought that something like a look of disappointment came over his face; but it was gone in an instant, and if he detected the evasion he forbore to remark upon it.

"That is reason enough for me," he replied tranquilly. "I don't know whether it will quite satisfy your friends; but perhaps they may be allowed to remain dissatisfied. When would you like to go?"

"I could be ready to-morrow," answered Hope. The truth was that she was very anxious to escape without seeing Bertie again.

Dick smiled slightly. "I think we had better not make a positive stampede," he said. "This is Thursday; suppose we leave on Monday? That would give us time to mention to one or two people that we felt the want of a change."

Hope could not demur to so reasonable a proposal; and presently Dick added: "It will suit me very well to get away a little sooner than I had expected. I rather want to run down to Portsmouth and have a look at the yacht."

"Might I go with you?" asked Hope timidly. "I have never seen your yacht, you know, and I think I should enjoy a short cruise. If I turned out a dis-

gracefully bad sailor, you could easily put me on shore somewhere and send me home."

"Oh, you couldn't go on board now," answered Dick; "she's up on the mud. I only wanted to see about fitting out, and I doubt whether she can be ready for sea much under a month or six weeks. Later on, if you cared to go to some of the regattas—— But I thought you hated yachting."

Hope well remembered having told him so, and it struck her that he was not particularly enchanted at her having changed her mind. "I haven't had much experience of it," she answered rather coldly; "but I certainly didn't enjoy the little that I had. After all, I think I prefer dry land."

Then she rose and left the room, taking a somewhat heavy heart upstairs with her. She was beginning to find her husband's good-natured toleration almost unendurable. She had no right to expect, and did not expect, love from him; but surely this was not the friendship that he had promised her! His one wish seemed to be to see as little as possible of her. Evidently she was destined to live her life out in solitude, and now she had been deprived of one of her few friends; for she felt that, after what she had heard that day, there could be no renewal of the intimacy which she had found so pleasant. Indeed, it was chiefly on that account that she was desirous of leaving London as soon as might be. An explanation with Bertie must be avoided, if possible; since it was not likely that he would believe in the excuse which her husband had appeared to find quite satisfactory. No doubt it was a good thing that Dick had not guessed

the truth; yet she could not help being exasperated with him for failing to guess it.

But the next morning fortune provided Mr. and Mrs. Herbert with a plausible pretext for withdrawal, and relieved them of the necessity of concocting a statement which certainly would not have taken in Lady Chatterton for one moment.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Dick, after reading the first words of a letter which he found upon the breakfast-table; "here's poor old Aunt Anne gone off at last. Carry thinks I had better go down for the funeral, and proposes to return with me. I'll bring her back to Farndon, of course. She won't care about London if she can't go out, and it wouldn't be decent for her to show herself at parties just now—especially if she comes into the property."

"Nor would it be decent for us," observed Hope, seizing one point of the news promptly.

"Hardly, perhaps. I wonder whether the old lady has left everything to Carry."

"Supposing that she has," Hope asked, a second point presenting itself to her, "would Carry have to live in Yorkshire, do you think?"

Dick laughed. "I'm sure I don't know," he replied; "I doubt whether she would take up her abode there all alone. To be sure, she might find some one to share it with her. Do you think——" He broke off, and looked across the table at his wife, who answered the question which he had not asked.

"Oh, most likely," she said. "The additional property ought to turn the scale, and we may expect the wedding to take place as soon as the days of mourning are at an end. Poor Captain Cunningham!"

Dick laughed again, but his laughter was not very hearty. "I don't know why you should call him 'poor Captain Cunningham,'" he remarked.

"Because he is poor. If he were not poor there would be no wedding, would there?" Then, feeling rather ashamed of this display of acrimony, she added: "After all, I daresay they will be as happy as most people. Why should they not be?"

"Why, not, indeed?" returned Dick, getting up. "One of them wishes for the marriage; the other, I suppose, doesn't much mind it; so it is all in accordance with custom and precedent."

There was an unusual ring of bitterness in his words; and Hope, thinking them over, after he had left the room, wondered what particular precedent he had had in his mind when he spoke. Was he accusing her of having wished to marry him? Or did he mean that it was he who had wished to marry her, and that she was the one who had not "much minded"? The latter interpretation was the more agreeable, and the facts of the case supported it; but unfortunately there was some difficulty in reconciling it with Dick's present rule of conduct, which seemed to be simply to go his own way and let his wife go hers.

CHAPTER III.

BERTIE MAKES A GREAT MISTAKE.

WHEN Lady Chatterton heard that Mr. and Mrs. Herbert had left London, she nodded her head approvingly, and, meeting Lady Jane Lefroy at a party that night, congratulated her in a few well-chosen words upon her niece's tact and common sense.

"Quite the right thing to do," she was so obliging as to say. "There are fifty ways of getting out of most scrapes; but the wisest of all is to make a bolt for it. Not over and above dignified, perhaps, but very effectual; and, quite between ourselves, I can't wonder that Mrs. Herbert should have taken to her heels, if she had begun making comparisons between Captain Cunningham and that lantern-jawed husband of hers. It was judicious to have an excuse too. Let me see; they killed some apocryphal relative, didn't they?"

"Indeed, no!" answered Lady Jane, plucking up a little courage; "not an apocryphal relative at all, but a genuine aunt by marriage, whom nobody killed and who died in her bed, leaving all that she possessed to Dick's sister. And I trust you will not think, or even say, that Hope ran away from Captain Cunningham, because that is very far from the truth. In reality, she will be nearer to him at Farndon than here, as he is quartered at Windsor."

Lady Chatterton grinned. "'Even say' is not so bad," she remarked; "you are developing a talent for repartee. But you need not be alarmed; didn't I tell

you that I rather liked your niece? I shall say nothing but good of her, and if she had killed and eaten her aunt by marriage it would have been quite the same thing to me. As for her being near Captain Cunningham in the country, that is her affair and her husband's, not mine. The law doesn't forbid a man to be drunk and disorderly in his own house, and the morals of society are not affected by what takes place within the limits of your own park-palings." And, having given this incidental definition of social ethics, Lady Chatterton passed on, with a twitch of her nose and a sniff.

It must be admitted that if Hope's object was to avoid meeting Bertie Cunningham, she was scarcely likely to attain that purpose by a move from Bruton Street to Farndon Court; but in truth it was rather the scrutiny of Lady Chatterton and other such persons that she longed to be delivered from. She had been deeply pained and angered by the revelation which had been made to her, and, for the time being, felt sickened with the whole fashionable world. She had enjoyed herself among these people; they had been kind to her and had made much of her, and she had believed a large proportion of them to be really her friends. Yet it seemed that, all the time, they had been busily circulating the cruellest rumours about her that can be circulated about a woman. She was glad to turn her back upon them and to shake the dust of their city off her feet. Bertie Cunningham she did not blame, being convinced that he was as innocent as herself; but, knowing that their future intercourse must be more or less constrained, she was not anxious to receive him, and trusted that his en-

gagements would prevent him from showing his face at Farndon before the end of the season, at least.

But it is needless to say that in this expectation she was disappointed. She had not been long at home when, looking out from an upper window one fine afternoon, she descried Captain Cunningham riding across the park; and as she watched him passing from sunlight into shade and again into the sunlight, it comforted her to reflect that she could not be called upon to grant him a private interview. In the presence of a third person he would hardly, she thought, display a troublesome curiosity as to the cause of her change of residence; and even if he did, her half-mourning costume and the deeper trappings and garb of woe worn by Carry would be a sufficient answer to him. For Carry had returned, richer by the possession of a commodious mansion and several thousand acres of Yorkshire soil, together with a goodly sum of hard cash in the Three per Cents; and Carry was at that moment seated in the drawing-room, from the windows of which apartment she, too, had detected Captain Cunningham's approach.

"Perhaps he has not come to see me after all," Hope thought, as she slowly descended the stairs; and this impression was confirmed when she entered the drawing-room and was confronted by her visitor. He greeted her with a certain formality; he looked grave and seemed ill at ease; insomuch that she began to wonder whether any male Lady Chatterton had been treating him as she herself had been treated.

Of course nothing of that kind had taken place. No man had felt it his duty to warn Bertie that he was compromising Mrs. Herbert by his behaviour—in-

deed it would have been rather late in the day to address such remonstrances to that quarter—nor had it occurred to him that he was in any way answerable for the abrupt disappearance from London of a lady whom he esteemed as much as he loved. What was making him uncomfortable was the apparition of what he felt to be his fate, in the person of the wealthy and sable-clad Carry. He had contrived of late to forget her, or, at any rate, not to think about her; but now here she was, as large as life, and at the sight of her his heart grew heavy within him.

Carry had a restless, excited look which was not unbecoming to her, her cheeks being a little pinker, and her eyes brighter than usual. Hope, as she came in, saw her sister-in-law make a scarcely perceptible movement of impatience, and understood that she was *de trop*; but there was no help for that. She sat down; and presently Bertie, resuming, as it seemed, an interrupted discussion, observed: "I call you uncommonly lucky, all the same. If any old woman would leave me an estate and a lot of coin, I shouldn't think a few weeks of watching by her bedside too long a price to pay for it."

"I don't deny that money is a useful thing," said Carry.

"Useful! Why, it's indispensable—simply indispensable! No doubt, you may be rich without being happy; but I really can't see how anybody is to be happy without being rich."

Carry opened her lips to speak, but closed them again, and was silent awhile. "I had as much as I required before," she remarked at length. "Aunt Anne's

money will do nothing for me—at least, I suppose not. It's a pity one can't give away one's superfluity."

"It is indeed! If such gifts could be accepted, I should have a word to put in for a deserving person," said Bertie, with dismal jocularly.

"And I should ask nothing better than to act upon your recommendation," returned Carry, knowing that she was treading upon dangerous ground, yet deriving a sort of painful pleasure from watching the play of the young man's countenance. She understood pretty well what was the nature of his feelings with regard to her; she knew that her wealth must be an immense temptation to him; there was only one rag of an illusion which she permitted herself to retain. "If he loved me ever so much, he could not marry me unless I were well off," was what she thought.

"The utmost that I could spend upon myself would be two or three thousand a year," she continued aloud; "enough to pay for keep, clothing, and four or five horses. For you it is quite different; there are so many things that men want."

Bertie nodded and sighed. "Yes; a heap," he agreed.

"And all of them indispensable?" Hope could not help asking.

She did not wait for his answer, but hurriedly changed the subject, and, after a quarter of an hour of desultory conversation, which was kept up with some difficulty, Bertie rose to take his leave.

He resolved, as he rode away, that his visits to Farndon should be few and far between for the present. It might be, and it probably was, his ultimate destiny to marry Miss Herbert; but to resume the pseudo-love-making which had been interrupted six

months before; to propose, and to become engaged to the woman whom he did not love, under the roof of the woman whom he did—no! he could not go through all that again. Some more fitting occasion would doubtless present itself. Indeed it was his habit to wait for fitting occasions, and the longer he had to wait, the better he was pleased. But, as might have been anticipated, his sense of the fitness of things was not strong enough to keep him away from Farndon Court for more than a few days; and, whatever may have been the attraction that drew him thither, he soon ceased to resist it. Being afraid to speak much or often to Hope, lest he should arouse Carry's jealousy, he did not notice that she avoided him. A certain coldness in her manner he did notice; but that, he thought, was easily to be accounted for. Of course she must despise him; of course she could feel nothing but contempt for the ignoble part which circumstances forced him to play. He put on a melancholy face whenever she appeared, and even in her absence was apt to be silent and out of spirits.

Thus a week or two passed away, without any special event to mark them, and the four persons who spent the greater portion of this quiet period together would have been as contented as fine weather and plenty of expedients for killing time could make them, had not each and all of them been irritated by a sense of suspense, and a conviction that things could not go on in this fashion much longer. Even Dick was provoked into saying to his wife: "I wish to goodness the fellow would do one thing or the other! The end of it will be that I shall have to ask him his intentions."

"Perhaps Carry will save you the trouble," an-

swered Hope, who was quite unable to feel any sympathy with her sister-in-law in this matter, although she was sincerely sorry for her.

"Upon my word, I believe it would be the best thing that she could do," returned Dick, laughing. "He is coming over to dine and sleep for the dance next Thursday, and if she doesn't bring him to the point then, I shall begin to doubt whether she ever will. It strikes me very forcibly that our young friend Cunningham is giving us all a great deal more bother than he is worth."

"It is hardly his doing," Hope felt bound in justice to the absent to urge.

"Well, perhaps not," agreed Dick pensively—"perhaps not. Very few things appear to be anybody's doing in particular, when you come to look into them."

It certainly was not Hope's doing that the neighbours had been bidden to a dance at Farndon Court. That, as well as sundry picnics and other entertainments of a mild order which had preceded it, was entirely due to the initiative of Carry, who may possibly have thought, as her brother did, that opportunities were thereby afforded to persons desirous of "coming to the point." It was by her suggestion also, that a numerous house party was invited to assemble at this time. Parliament having now risen, the Lefroys, among others, were persuaded to pay their niece a flying visit, and Hope derived some satisfaction from the thought that any lingering suspicions of her which Lady Jane might harbour would now probably be dispelled. It would take a very perverse person to see Captain Cunningham and Miss Herbert together, and then accuse the former of flirting with his hostess.

Nor did Lady Jane fail to justify expectation. She arrived on the afternoon of the day appointed for the dance, and during dinner made use of her eyeglasses to such purpose that she afterwards took Hope aside and squeezed her hand, saying, with warm approval: "My dear, you have managed it admirably!—so wise of you to have a few people whom one knows in the house! Between ourselves I may tell you that your flight at such very short notice *was* a little remarked upon; but you couldn't make a better answer than this. It is an old affair, you know; it has been dragging on for I don't know how long, and I really don't think he can back out of it now. Though to be sure there is no telling, because in these days young men don't seem to care what they do, and no one ever dreams of bringing them to book. But, at all events, everybody must admit that *you* have done your best to bring on a crisis; and that is the main thing."

"The main thing," thought Hope, "is to be thoroughly selfish." But it was just as well not to say this, and as she had done nothing to promote or impede the crisis alluded to, she was disposed neither to blame herself nor to claim credit from others. She was a little disappointed in Bertie, and she believed that Carry was on the way towards the commission of a fatal blunder; but the turn which events had taken was beyond her control, and was most likely the inevitable outcome of equally inevitable circumstances. After all, as Dick had averred, very few things were the doing of anybody in particular.

Upheld by this agreeable sense of irresponsibility, Hope discharged the less complicated duty of receiving her guests in a manner which left nothing to be de-

sired. Her season in London had not been thrown away upon her. She had learnt without much difficulty the knack, which many ladies who live in the world and for the world never acquire, of being ready with the right thing to say at the right moment; she looked very beautiful and very distinguished; and Lady Jane, tapping Dick emphatically on the arm with her fan, said: "A success—a complete success! Allow me to congratulate you. I may be allowed to congratulate myself too; for I always maintained that Hope was just the wife for you."

"It is only fair to admit that you always did," answered Dick. "I don't recollect, though, that I ever expressed any doubt of it myself."

"No; not you. But she doubted a good deal, I can assure you. However, all's well that ends well."

"Have we come to the end yet?" asked Dick, and turned away without waiting for a reply.

The spacious rooms, opening one out of the other, which formed the ground floor of Farndon Court, were well adapted for entertaining, and seemed, indeed, to have been built for that end. Lighted by an abundance of wax candles, and decorated with masses of flowers, which the head gardener had sacrificed in much bitterness of spirit, they deserved the encomium passed upon them by an enthusiastic gentleman who said: "By Jove, Mrs. Herbert, with a house like this, you ought to give a ball every week!" The warm, scented air was stirred by waves of the fitful breeze which was blowing outside, and which set the lace curtains swaying; the plaintive melody of the waltzes rose and fell in measured cadence. Hope flitted from room to room, talking to the dowagers, introducing shy

youths to partnerless maidens, and every now and then pausing to watch the dancers, among whom Bertie and Carry were conspicuous. Carry was an admirable waltzer, Hope noticed. She herself declined to dance in the earlier part of the evening, despite the earnest request of Bertie, whose protestations she cut short rather summarily. It was not until nearly midnight that she yielded to the entreaties, or rather commands, of one of his brother-officers—a smooth-faced, fair-haired boy, fresh from Eton—who was determined to have what he wanted and would take no refusal.

“Oh, but you must, you know, Mrs. Herbert,” he said. “You’ve been doing your duty like a Spartan for the last two hours, and I’m not going to let you sit out any longer to please anybody.”

So Hope laughed and allowed him to whirl her away, and a passing glance which she obtained of Bertie’s surprised and angry face was, somehow or other, not displeasing to her. Why she should have derived gratification from this disappointment of an old friend she did not ask herself; nor was she able to give any good reason for repeating her refusal when he again approached her and begged, rather formally, for the next waltz. It was then considerably later, and during the interval she had had three different partners.

“But that only shows that I have danced too much and ought to stop,” she said, when he reminded her of this circumstance.

“I think it shows that you are ready to dance with everybody except me,” Bertie returned. “And I can’t make out why.”

It suddenly struck Hope that she was giving rather too much importance to a small matter. “As you

please, then," she said and laid her hand on his shoulder without more ado. Lady Jane was out of sight; nobody was watching her; and, when all was said and done, there could be little harm in taking a few turns round the room with a man who was as good as engaged to her sister-in-law.

But perhaps it was not quite so wise to step through one of the open windows and out on to the terrace with him when the waltz came to an end. Hope did so, in the first place because he suggested it and because it is very disagreeable to say "No" to every proposition that is made to you, and in the second because she thought that it would be pleasant to take a peep out of doors on such a fine night. And very pleasant it certainly was out there in the cool, dark garden. The breeze had died away into a dead calm; there was a fresh, moist fragrance in the air, and a silvery haze hung over the grass. The full moon, sinking in the west, was hidden by a belt of trees; but its light fell upon the wooded hills opposite, and nothing could be more natural than to walk on a short distance and look down upon the lake, which lay in deep shadow beneath. Hope dropped the cloak which she had brought out with her on to the balustrade and, resting her arms upon it, contemplated the prospect, to which Bertie, who had seated himself sideways so as to command a full view of something which pleased him more, turned his back.

"Would you mind," he asked, "telling me what I have done to affront you?"

Hope started, and began to wish that she had remained indoors. She had been expecting this question any time during the past three weeks; but as it had

never been put, she had lately concluded that Captain Cunningham did not value her friendship so very highly, and that he had not observed any diminution of cordiality on her part. The consequence was that she was taken by surprise, and could not recollect any of the appropriate speeches which she had prepared for this emergency.

"You are quite mistaken; I am not in the least affronted with you," was all that she found to say.

"Your voice tells a different story. I wish you would speak plainly to me. And yet I am not sure that I do wish it; it isn't necessary. Of course I know why you are annoyed with me; and you are right, I suppose. I am going to do a shabby sort of thing—though I didn't think it a specially shabby thing until—until—I knew you; and it's only what other men do every day and are rather praised for than not. I can't help it; that's my sole excuse."

"I don't pretend to set myself up as a judge of your actions," answered Hope, rather relieved to find that he was upon the wrong tack; "but I should have thought that nobody need do wrong knowingly. And if you compare yourself with others, isn't it the knowledge of committing a shabby action that makes all the difference between you and them?"

"Oh, I daresay it is," replied the young man despondently. "I shouldn't consider it shabby if it were not for—for—well, never mind. To marry without being in love is not a shabby action in itself; you'll allow that."

"Not so long as there is no pretence, perhaps."

"But there must be pretence; we discussed that point once before, if you remember. I'm sure I don't know what to do! It seems to me that I have got be-

tween the devil and the deep sea, and whichever way I turn, there is grief ahead. Decide for me! I would rather have your decision than my own. Shall I marry or shall I not?"

"How can you expect me to answer such a question!" exclaimed Hope. "I couldn't if I would, and most certainly I wouldn't if I could."

"In point of fact you don't care."

"I care very much. We have been great friends——"

"But we aren't great friends any longer?" interrupted Bertie.

"Yes, we are. At all events, we can be again, and I am sure you have my best wishes. But you must see how impossible it is that I should make up your mind for you. There is a great deal to be said on both sides—more than I know of, most likely. If you have to choose between two evils, you must take the lesser, I suppose."

"Is that all the help that you can give me?"

"What would you have me say? As far as I can judge, it would be disgraceful in you to draw back now; but I don't know whether it isn't even more disgraceful to marry for the sake of money alone."

If Bertie had foreseen that his conduct was going to be called disgraceful, he would not, perhaps, have asked Mrs. Herbert to accompany him to the terrace. Such language was by no means what he was accustomed to hear, and in his vexation he forgot himself so far as to murmur: "Yet that was what you did yourself."

Hope crimsoned all over her face and neck. "That is neither just nor true!" she cried. "You have no right to say such things to me, and I am very sorry that you should have thought you could."

She picked up her cloak as she spoke, and moved away towards the house. But Bertie sprang off the parapet and caught her hand.

"For God's sake, don't quarrel with me!" he exclaimed; "anything rather than that! I beg your pardon a thousand times over for having offended you. Of course I ought not to have said it; but you don't know how miserable I am! Or perhaps you do know—I think you must know. You can't have helped seeing how I love you. I loved you the very first time that I saw you—at that ball, do you remember?—and I always shall love you as long as I live. If only things had been different!—if only I could have ventured to tell you long ago——"

He did not finish his sentence. Hope had wrenched her hand away from him, had retreated a pace, and was looking at him in a way which fairly struck him dumb with amazement. Her face had lost every vestige of colour, and its expression of horror and disgust could not have been greater if he had been the vilest wretch alive, instead of being only an unhappy young man, crossed in love.

"What is the matter?" he stammered out foolishly.

Hope could not reply. She averted her head and suddenly threw out her hands, as if she were trying to push some hideous sight away from her. Then she moved quickly towards the house. But after taking a few steps, she turned and faced the young man who was following her.

"We must keep up appearances," she said in a hard voice. "That is the great thing, is it not?—the only thing that you, and people like you, care about. I shall have to meet you sometimes, I suppose; but I will

never speak to you again, if I can help it. And one thing more: I don't believe what you told me just now; I don't believe that you know what love is. But nothing that you can ever say or do will make me forget that you have taken me for a woman who might be safely insulted."

And so she passed through the open window into the ball-room, and, maintaining a self-command which astonished herself, was presently walking through a set of lancers with the first person who had chanced to cross her path.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSION.

FROM the days of St. Paul, and perhaps from a still earlier period, it has been admitted that, as regards many of the incidents and accidents of life, a man must be his own judge and fix his standard of right and wrong for himself. There are persons who feel bound to quench their thirst only with non-intoxicating beverages, and there are persons who are content to refrain from allowing their beverages to intoxicate them; some consider it a duty to fast rigorously throughout Lent, while others are of opinion that abstinence from pudding on Friday fully meets the requirements of the case. It all depends upon the point of view; and although it might be dangerous to strain this principle of toleration too far (lest we should find ourselves compelled to excuse the peculiarities of the Peculiar People), it may be conceded that a married woman who has received a declaration of love from somebody who is not her

husband need not of necessity take blame to herself on that account. Indeed, it seems probable that there are a good many married ladies who would never dream of so doing.

But, fortunately or unfortunately, Hope Herbert did not happen to be one of these. To her mind, a woman who had passed through such an experience must be more or less disgraced by it, just as a man to whom a bribe has been offered cannot recover his self-respect by a mere refusal of it; since bribes are not offered to persons likely to refuse them. She had wished to be, and until lately had believed herself to be, *omni suspitione major*; but now there was no getting over the fact that this was not the view universally taken of her. Furious as she was against Bertie Cunningham, and unsparing as was her condemnation of him, a careful process of self-examination obliged her to find him guilty with extenuating circumstances. She saw that her intimacy with him had been liable to misconception, and, although he ought never to have misconceived it, it was, perhaps, hardly wonderful that he should have done so. Therefore, instead of employing the few hours left of the night in going to sleep, she tossed and turned miserably, and was filled with distress and repentance.

Now true repentance, as the Church has always taught, consists of three parts: namely, contrition, confession, and amendment; and a much more comfortable thing it would be for us poor sinners if it only consisted of the first. As for Hope, she would have had no difficulty in accomplishing the third into the bargain; it was the second that she dreaded, and yet could not see her way to escape. Here again the point of view

is the sign-post which seekers after the right path have to consult; and one may imagine that a conscientious woman, placed as Hope was, might deem it needless to take her husband into her confidence. The objections to such a course are manifest, and the duty of it not so clear but that a very trifling application of casuistry will suffice to obscure it. But there was a fatal honesty and directness in Hope's character which prevented casuistry from being of any use to her. She had offended against Dick—innocently, no doubt, still she had offended—and nothing short of acknowledging as much to him could set her at peace with herself again. Assuredly it was not fear of the consequences that ought to close her lips; yet she hoped that these would not be very terrible. He would hardly be so ungenerous as to blame her; and, if he were moderately generous, he might even be disposed to blame himself a little. He might have foreseen what was likely to happen; he might have given her a word of warning—he, who knew the world and the wicked ways of men so much better than she did. But in any case he must be told.

When she went down to breakfast she was relieved to hear that Bertie had already fled.

“Captain Cunningham asked me to say good-bye to you for him,” Carry, whose face wore an anxious and annoyed expression, informed her. “He had a telegram early this morning, telling him to return to duty at once. Not very civil of his Colonel, I think, considering that the man was here last night and must have known that we didn't want our visitors to be hustled off before breakfast.”

Hope felt some doubt as to whether the poor Colonel

had been guilty of the incivility attributed to him, but was very willing to pardon him if he had. The majority of her guests, including her uncle and aunt, were leaving her that day, and a private interview with Dick was out of the question before the afternoon. She forced herself to talk, and was glad to find that she could do so with tolerable ease.

"You are looking very pale, my dear," Lady Jane said. "I am afraid you over-tired yourself last night; but you have the comfort of knowing that it was a great success." And then, in an undertone: "*Do* you think that wretched little man has gone off without doing his duty, after all? Between you and me, I know he didn't have a telegram this morning, because the butler told my maid that none had arrived for anybody."

"Perhaps Carry has refused him," said Hope, allowing herself that little bit of duplicity as a set-off against the candour which she was about to display by and by.

But Lady Jane's only answer to so absurd an hypothesis was a snort of derision.

That necessity for keeping up appearances which Hope had sneered at the night before, and which all of us find a little irksome at times, ought not, after all, to be counted among the burdens of existence, since it forces us not only to conceal our troubles but to put them out of our minds. Hope was busy all the morning making civil speeches and saying good-bye to her visitors, and so had no time either to fret over what had happened in the past or to grow alarmed as to what was about to happen in the immediate future. By luncheon time the house was almost empty, and

she was then able to see the approach of her opportunity. In the afternoon Dick was to drive a bachelor friend of his down to the station: her obvious plan would be to intercept him at the confines of the park on his return, and make her confession while he walked back with her to the house. Carry, who never requested her company and doubtless never desired it, would not be likely to throw obstacles in the way of this scheme.

Everybody is agreed that when a tooth has to be drawn the sooner it comes out the better; but it is only exceptionally strong-minded persons who can contrive to be cheerful during the hours preceding the operation, and it must be confessed that when Hope, looking at her watch, found that it was already half-past four, and that she must start at once if she wished to make sure of catching her husband at a given point, her heart began to sink within her. She had never quite succeeded in fathoming the depths of Dick's nature. He himself would probably have declared that there were none to fathom, and certainly it was not his habit to conceal either his tastes or his opinions; but every one must have a temper somewhere or other about him, and the less he shows it the more stormy it is apt to be when aroused. So far as Hope was concerned Dick's temper was an unknown quantity. She had not once seen him angry; but then since their marriage there really had been nothing to make him so. What she half knew and half surmised was that his notions of duty were of the strictest order, and that he was by no means given to recognising degrees of right and wrong. She felt almost sure that he would either absolve her altogether or condemn her utterly, and she was afraid that if he did condemn her, he might do

so with a violence which she would not be able readily to pardon. In short, she perceived that there was danger ahead, and longed, as every one must at such times, to be either in the thick of it or out of it; so that, as she made her way across the park, her courage required constant turns of the screw to keep it up to the sticking-point.

The day had been hot and airless, but now a light wind had sprung up, setting the leaves whispering softly overhead, as Hope skirted the woods. The rabbits scuttled away on her approach, but not very fast, for they were quite well aware that she did not carry a gun; bright-eyed squirrels peered down at her from the boughs, and in the cool depths of the thickets the birds were calling to one another. To all these sights and sounds, which ordinarily pleased her, she paid little heed, but hastened on, as though by increasing her pace she could bring Dick back from the station any sooner or cause the bad quarter of an hour that was coming to begin a second before its appointed time. Naturally enough, the only consequence of her hurry was that she made herself uncomfortably hot and reached the wicket gate, for which she was bound, a good deal earlier than was necessary. She leaned over it, looking down the white, dusty high road, and listening for the sound of wheels; and after a while, as the silence remained unbroken, she began, somewhat inconsistently, to think what a blessed reprieve it would be if Dick had driven round by the gamekeeper's cottage, as he sometimes did, and had thus given her a walk for nothing.

But there was as yet no ground for any such conjecture, for her watch told her that it still wanted several minutes to the time at which she had calculated that

her husband would pass the spot where she was standing, and the result proved the accuracy of her forecast. Punctually to the moment she heard the quick beat of a fast-trotting horse's hoofs upon the road, and presently a high dog-cart hove in sight, in which Dick was seated aloft, smoking a cigar and flicking at the hedgerows with his whip as he bowled along. She threw the gate open and stepped out as soon as he was opposite to her, whereupon he pulled up with a jerk and called out: "Oh, it's you, is it? Shall I give you a lift?"

"No, thank you," answered Hope, trying, without conspicuous success, to look as if nothing was the matter; "but if you are not too lazy you might walk home with me."

Dick immediately handed the reins to the groom and descended with much deliberation. He had a few words to say to the man, and while he was saying them Hope scanned his face anxiously. How would he take it? Was he in a good humour? But the futility of such queries was obvious. Dick's face looked exactly as it always looked, and as for being in a good humour, was he not always in a good humour? When he joined her and remarked, with his customary equanimity: "I've just had a telegram from Newmarket to say that Sarsaparilla has broken down—split her pastern at exercise this morning," she felt that she could not at once plunge into the midst of her avowal.

Sarsaparilla was the most valuable of Dick's small string of thoroughbreds, and as great things had been expected of the mare, it was necessary to express some condolence. So they talked a little of racing matters, which led them to speak of Jacob Stiles and of pic-

tures and various other topics, and it seemed as if the conversation could by no possibility be brought round to the subject of Captain Cunningham and his delinquencies. Hope was nervous and talked very much at random; but Dick, lounging along by her side, with his hands in his pockets, did not seem to notice her embarrassment, and was altogether so easy and unsuspecting that she felt her task becoming more difficult every minute. Several times she tried to speak, but the words died away in her throat and her heart thumped against her ribs, until at last she told herself that this would never do, and that she must shiver on the brink no longer. About a hundred yards ahead of them a spreading beech tree threw its shade across the grass. "When we get to that tree," she thought to herself, "I will tell him." And as soon as they had reached the spot, she stopped short, interrupting him in the middle of a sentence.

"Dick," she said, in a voice which sounded to her very queer and unlike her own, "I went to meet you on purpose: I have something to say to you."

"So I rather imagined," observed Dick placidly.

"Why? What do you mean?" she asked, turning upon him with a quick look of alarm.

"Only that you don't as a rule ask me to take a walk with you, you know. Besides, I thought from your face, when you stopped me, that there was something in the wind."

"There is something—something dreadful! I don't know how to tell you about it." She paused, and then went on appealingly: "Dick, we agreed, didn't we, that we would always be honest with one another?—that we would have no concealments?"

Dick nodded, his face becoming a shade graver. "Well?" he said.

"Well, that is why I thought I must let you know—though it would have been so much easier to say nothing, and I suppose you would never have found out." Here she came to a second standstill, thinking that perhaps he would give her a word of encouragement, but he did not open his lips, and she had to blunder on as best she could. "It was last night—at the dance—I went out on to the terrace with Captain Cunningham,—and—and——"

At this point Hope broke down altogether, and suddenly burst into tears. It was in no such fashion that she had intended to tell her tale. She had meant to be calm and collected, to relate without much comment exactly what had occurred, and to submit with meekness but dignity to any reproaches that Dick might think himself justified in addressing to her; but instead of that, she was behaving like a silly hysterical school-girl, and was speaking quite unintelligibly into the bargain. However, there was nothing for it but to proceed.

"I went out on to the terrace with him," she repeated between her sobs, "and he said—he said——"

"That he loved you?" suggested Dick, in a quiet, level voice.

Hope nodded over her pocket-handkerchief. "I couldn't help it," she murmured; "I had not the least idea of what he was going to say; and—and I told him that I would never speak to him again."

She could hardly distinguish her husband's features through her tears; but presently he broke the silence, and his voice certainly sounded rather cold. "Never

mind," he said; "don't distress yourself. Sit down here, and you will be better in a few minutes."

Hope did as she was told. She seated herself on the short, dry grass beneath the beech tree, and, leaning back against the trunk, tried to swallow down the lump which would keep rising in her throat, while Dick, his hands still in his pockets, moved away a few yards, and stood with his back turned towards her and his head slightly bent. It was difficult to guess from his attitude in what way the news had affected him, or whether it had affected him at all. After what seemed a long time he slowly returned, and Hope, looking up into his face, saw that it was very grave.

"Are you angry with me, Dick?" she asked, timidly.

"No," he answered, "I am not angry with you; I should be utterly unreasonable if I were. You have done all that you could possibly do. You have sent Cunningham away, and you have told me the truth at once. The rest is no fault of yours."

"I don't know; I am afraid it was my fault a little. I ought to have known what was coming, for Aunt Jane warned me, and so did Lady Chatterton; only I would not believe them."

"As far as that goes, I ought to have known too," observed Dick; "but what is done can't be undone, and there is no use in looking back over one's shoulder. The future is the only thing that we can control."

He spoke quietly and without the slightest appearance of emotion; but somehow Hope was not quite reassured. "You—you—won't do anything to him, will you, Dick?" she hazarded.

"Horsewhip him, do you mean? Oh dear, no;

what would be the good? For Carry's sake, as well as for yours, I shall take no notice."

"For Carry's sake!" echoed Hope. "But surely you don't think that there can be anything between her and Captain Cunningham *now*!"

Dick smiled and looked apologetic: "Well, you see, I've reached middle age, or something very near it," he said.

"What then?" asked Hope, being unable to perceive the relevance of his observation.

"Only that at my time of life I can't help knowing how easily men get over these things. He will return to Carry—and her fortune, you may depend upon it; and whenever he does return she will accept him gratefully. It isn't exactly what you could call desirable; but it can't be helped. People must be allowed to make their own lives for themselves."

This philosophic acquiescence in the frailties of human nature did not please Hope, who rejoined, somewhat sharply: "I don't see how you can be so sure. Most likely you have never been in love in the whole course of your life."

"Oh yes, I have—once," replied Dick, after a moment of hesitation.

"And you got over it very easily, no doubt."

"Well, I don't look broken-hearted, do I?"

"You certainly do not. But everybody is not so sensible."

"You mean insensible, perhaps? But I wasn't talking about everybody; I was talking about Cunningham. Nevertheless, a time does come—it may be long or it may be quick in coming—when everybody ceases to wish for what can't be had. Believe me, you will find

it so. This isn't a subject which you and I can very well discuss together now; but perhaps some day it may be different. Meanwhile, least said soonest mended."

Hope knitted her brows and stared at him. "You speak as if I—as if I—cared for Captain Cunningham!" she exclaimed.

"If you did, I don't think you would have any reason to be ashamed of it. You have never deceived me. From the very first you told me distinctly that you had no love for me; and if afterwards you met somebody whom you could love, it was—well, a piece of bad luck, that's all."

"But I don't love him; I hate him!" cried Hope, vehemently. "What right have you to bring such accusations against me?" And then, as Dick made no reply: "Don't you believe me?" she exclaimed.

"I think you have behaved as honourably as it was possible to behave," answered Dick; "and I believe that you speak with perfect sincerity."

"No, you don't," she returned, deeply wounded; "you don't believe me in the least! And after all, how little it signifies! So long as I behave what you call honourably—by which I suppose you mean, so long as I don't create a public scandal—you will be satisfied. Make your mind easy, then; I shall never disgrace you. But I wish—oh, I *wish* I had never married you!"

Dick received this outburst as phlegmatically as he had received her previous display of agitation. "I am afraid it has been a sad mistake," he agreed. "All that I can say is that I honestly thought I was consulting your happiness, as well as my own, at the time;

and even now—however, we won't anticipate. The best plan is to take short views of life, go on from day to day, and do one's duty. In the long run, crooked things become straight."

"One's duty!" repeated Hope scornfully; "that is easily said. What are your duties, I wonder?—and how do you do them?"

"I'm afraid I often neglect them," answered Dick, humbly enough.

"And sometimes mistake them, perhaps."

"Very likely. But I think I can see my duty pretty clearly, so far as you are concerned. And I should like just to thank you for having treated me so fairly. It is no more than I should have expected of you; but for all that, I know very well that you have done what nine women out of ten would have shirked. You need not have said that about not disgracing me; I trust you as implicitly as I trust myself."

"You may certainly trust me," answered Hope coldly.

They had resumed their walk long before this and were now at the entrance of the house, where they parted. Hope was not in the least appeased by the formal tribute to her honourable conduct expressed in her husband's last speech. He had been pleased to say that he trusted her; but he had doubted her word; and what was worse was that he had not cared at all whether she was speaking the truth or not. He had put aside the question of her loving or not loving Captain Cunningham as though it had been of quite secondary importance. It was "bad luck" for her, he had said; but he evidently did not look upon it as being bad luck for himself. He was just like Lady Jane and all the rest of them. "Do what you please, only

don't make a scandal" was the beginning and end of their code. As she thought, with burning anger, of the scene which she had just passed through, and realised how out of place her agitation had been, she almost found it in her heart to wish that she did love Bertie Cunningham, even though she should never see or speak to him again. "Right or wrong, it would be better than nothing. What is life worth if one is to care for nobody and be cared for by nobody?" she exclaimed.

And the luxurious fittings of her boudoir, the wide-stretching gardens that could be seen through the open windows, the park and the woods beyond, and all the evidences of wealth and refinement that were about her, could give no answer to that pertinent question.

CHAPTER V.

JACOB GOES OUT FOR A RIDE.

ONE hot morning in August Jacob Stiles, feeling weary and exhausted, laid down his brushes and maulstick and went to the window for a mouthful of fresh air. He drew into his lungs one or two long breaths of that smoke-charged compound which goes by the name of air in London, and which the death-rate of that city shows to be extremely wholesome, but which no stretch of courtesy can call fresh. It failed to refresh Jacob, who returned into the room, threw a cloth over the canvas upon which he had been at work, and said to himself that it was high time to be off.

There was nothing to prevent him from starting north, south, east, or west, as soon as he pleased; for

his successful season had brought him ample funds, and he had nobody's convenience to consult save his own; but, perhaps because he was possessed of such absolute freedom, he felt no inclination to make use of it; and after meditating for a short time he made up his mind to go quietly down to Farndon as usual. At Farndon, at any rate, he would find a friend, which was more than he could say with certainty of any other spot on the earth's surface. In becoming famous as an artist he had become no better known as an individual, and the few advances which had been made to him he had discouraged; for he recognised his destiny and had long ago said to himself, like the poet: "Thou hast been, art, shalt be, alone." But this did not prevent him from longing for the sight of Hope's beautiful, kind face and the sound of her soft voice; so he packed up his belongings and took his ticket for Windsor that same evening.

It had long been his habit to come and go in this way, giving no notice of his movements. His rooms were always ready for him at Farndon, and often he would be for days in the house before the master of it chanced to come across him. Upon the present occasion he drove into the stable-yard, as his custom was, and his arrival was noticed only by a few of the servants. There were no visitors just now the man who brought him his dinner informed him. There had been a large party; but it had dispersed after the dance which had taken place two nights before, and now only the family was at home. There was, therefore, no reason why Jacob should not venture down to the drawing-room after dinner and shake hands with Mrs. Herbert; but he refrained from doing so, pre-

ferring to wait for a chance encounter. The next morning, however, hearing that Mr. Herbert was alone in his study, he betook himself thither, carrying with him a sporting paper which he had just received.

Dick was poring over a large map, which he rolled up somewhat hastily as Jacob entered. "Oh, is that you, Jake?" he said. "You've had enough of London, I suppose. Sit down and smoke a cigar."

There was a slight alteration in his face and in the ring of his voice which at once made it clear to Jacob's quick perceptions that something had happened to annoy him; but Jacob would as soon have thought of slapping the President of the Royal Academy on the back as of asking what that something might be. Besides the paper which he held in his hand afforded a sufficient explanation.

"I am sorry to see," he said, "that Sarsaparilla has gone wrong."

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "I hope you haven't backed her for the Leger."

"I never back horses," answered Jacob, thinking to himself, "As if he didn't know that!"

Presently he resumed: "It is an unlucky accident; but it isn't irreparable, you know. The mare will come again, I have no doubt."

"I don't care two straws whether she does or not," returned Dick, with unwonted roughness. Then, seeing the other's look of astonishment, he added, "The fact is that my horses will be brought to the hammer before long. I am thinking of going over to America to shoot, and if I carry out my present plan, I shall be away at least a year."

Before Dick's marriage this sudden determination

would have been only in accordance with his habits, and would have called for no remark; but under the changed circumstances it sounded not a little startling, and Jacob, for all his discretion, could not help saying: "And Mrs. Herbert? Does she go with you?"

"Of course not," answered Dick tranquilly. "Camping out in the Rocky Mountains is not exactly the life for a lady—especially in winter."

Jacob said nothing; but his thoughts were so plainly written on his face that Dick was pleased to reply to them. "No," he said; "Mrs. Herbert and I have not quarrelled, and I take it that she will have no objection at all to my amusing myself in my own way. She was quite aware before our marriage that I am an incurable rolling stone. However, as I have made no arrangements as yet, you had better consider this a confidential communication."

Jacob's feelings towards his benefactor had for many years been of a curiously mixed character, being composed in something like equal parts of admiration, fear, gratitude, and resentment. He believed that he understood perfectly the existing state of the relations between Dick and his wife, and he believed, furthermore, that he knew what those relations might easily become. The question was whether, for both their sakes, he ought not to speak a word in season, at the risk of being roundly snubbed. He was silent for a few minutes, and it was not without a considerable effort that he brought himself at length to say: "Do you think it is quite fair on Mrs. Herbert to leave her like this for a year or more?"

Dick was not offended; only a good deal surprised. "Evidently *you* don't think so," he remarked. "I

haven't heard such a direct expression of opinion from you for a very long time, Jake. Now, you mustn't mind my saying that you had better not meddle with what doesn't concern you. Every man is the best judge of his own business; and I can assure you, if you don't know it already, that two people may be excellent friends and yet not miss one another much when they are parted."

"That was not quite what I meant," returned Jacob hesitatingly.

"Then what in the world did you mean?"

"Only that—it isn't very easy to express it, and as you say it is no concern of mine——"

"Go on, man," broke in Dick impatiently. "Either speak out or hold your tongue, whichever you please."

Jacob flushed slightly. "I wanted to warn you, or rather to remind you," he said, "that there are dangers to which any woman, however good she may be, must be exposed when she is so ostentatiously neglected."

"I am not at all surprised at your saying so," observed Dick quietly. "No doubt, your notion of common sense is to trust people so long as they are in sight. Well, that doesn't happen to be my notion. I consider that everybody has a *primâ facie* right to be trusted, and I do trust everybody, in sight and out of sight, until they play me false."

"And never afterwards."

"And never afterwards," Dick agreed. He was simply stating a fact, and had neither intention nor consciousness of wounding his monitor; but Jacob, always on the look-out for allusions to his own bygone offence, winced as if he felt again on his shoulders the lash of the horsewhip which had punished it.

"Yes; that is your plan!" he exclaimed bitterly,

"and it is as senseless as it is cruel. Because a man has done wrong once, can he never do right again? Have you yourself never done wrong? Oh, I know what you would say; you have never done anything dishonourable or base. It is neither base nor dishonourable to go away for your own enjoyment and leave your wife exposed to temptations which you, perhaps, wouldn't be able to resist in her place. No; at the worst, that is only thoughtless—only a little over-generous and confident."

"We'll drop this, Jake, if you please," said Dick, with some sternness. "You may abuse me as much as you like; but I can't allow you to speak as if Mrs. Herbert were in any danger from the kind of temptation that you hint at."

Jacob turned away without a word, and made for the door; but when his hand was on the lock Dick called after him, in a somewhat gentler voice: "Don't be offended, Jake; I'm sure your intentions are good, and I'm obliged to you for saying what you think honestly. But the truth is that you can't quite understand the nature of the case."

"I am not offended—if that matters," answered Jacob, as he left the room. But he was very deeply offended, and Dick's last words had not helped to remove the cause of offence. He could not understand the nature of the case, forsooth! In other words, a thief and a forger was incapable of entering into the feelings of honourable people. Nevertheless, the case was not such a hard one to understand. A loveless marriage, a careless husband, a lover who comes upon the scene too late—was it too much for any one to declare that there were elements of danger in such a

situation as that? Jacob had watched Hope and Cunningham together; he was convinced that the man loved her, and feared that—knowingly or unknowingly—she returned his love. Hope was to him the type of all that is purest and loveliest in woman, and the thought of what might so easily befall her was a torture to him. He cursed Dick's blindness and selfishness; yet all the time he could not help admitting that there was something noble in the attitude of this blind and selfish man, something ignoble in his own suspicions. Was it not both shameful and inconsistent to assume that the lady whom he worshipped was no more proof against temptation than others of her sex? Many an idol has feet of clay; but at least those who prostrate themselves before it should be unable to discern them.

Jacob wandered feverishly up and down his studio, until at length, feeling that he could neither work nor sit still, he went down to the stables, saddled a horse for himself and rode out. He had purposely chosen an ill-tempered, unmanageable beast, who began to give him trouble immediately; but he did not vent his irritation upon his mount, as many men would have done. In the saddle he was always cool, patient, and conscious of his power. The animal could not unseat him and must end by obeying him. He knew that, and derived some solace from a sensation which he never experienced at any other time.

He cantered down the long shooting-alleys of Windsor Forest, having enough to do to keep the powerful mare that he was riding under control, and being thus relieved from the pressure of painful thoughts. When he emerged into the Great Park, a herd of fallow-deer, darting out suddenly from beneath

the shade of a tree, startled the mare, who plunged violently and then broke clean away. Jacob did not mind this in the least. She was out of his hand; but he knew that he had grass before him the whole way to Windsor, and if it amused her to run away, she might run and welcome. Neither he nor she would be any the worse for it. So for a couple of miles or more he was borne at racing speed across the undulating expanse of park-land, managing to steer clear of the oaks and hawthorns, but charging through the patches of bracken and up the steepest slopes, until the mare had had enough of it and willingly allowed herself to be pulled in to a walk. It was a blazing summer day, and both she and her rider were very hot and short of breath by this time. Both of them, too, had been reduced to a frame of mind much calmer than that in which they had started. Jacob took off his hat, passed his handkerchief over his forehead and sighed. "After all," he muttered, "something like this was inevitable. I always knew that; and so, I daresay, did she. Where in the world did I find the pluck to speak to Herbert as I did just now? I'm glad I did speak; though of course it was no use."

He pulled up under the shade of a tree to let the mare get her wind before he turned her head homewards, and while he was sitting there, lost in thought, a voice suddenly hailed him: "Hi! Stiles, is that you?"

Jacob, glancing over his shoulder, descried another horseman approaching across the turf, and a subdued exclamation of annoyance escaped him when he recognised Captain Cunningham. He did not like Captain Cunningham, and would gladly have avoided speaking to him had that been practicable.

Bertie, drawing nearer, greeted him cheerily with: "How are you, Stiles? Glad to see you in these parts again. Are you on your way home? If you are, perhaps, you wouldn't mind giving this note to Mrs. Herbert for me."

Jacob threw a sidelong, distrustful glance at him. He had no fancy for the part of a go-between and was very much inclined to tell Captain Cunningham that he might post his letter or deliver it himself.

"Not if it is any bother to you," said Bertie, noticing the other's hesitation. "I thought it would save me the ride, that was all."

"Very well," responded Jacob curtly, holding out his hand for the note, which, as he had now had time to reflect, might only be an answer to an invitation after all.

He gathered up his reins and was already moving when Bertie checked him by making some remark about his horse, and, after conversing for a few minutes with that slight air of condescension which affronted Jacob more than downright rudeness, asked carelessly; "Everybody all right at Farndon? Mrs. Herbert not too tired after the ball, I hope?"

It struck Jacob that the carelessness of the inquiry was a little overdone, and that there was a suggestion of disquietude underlying it. "I only returned last night," he answered, "and I haven't seen Mrs. Herbert yet."

"Oh!" said Bertie; and this time his voice had a distinct intonation of disappointment.

Jacob nodded, touched the mare with his heel, and cantered away. "No concern of mine," he kept repeating to himself, as he went; "whatever happens can

be no concern of mine—which seems odd, considering that I would die for her. What a fool I must be! Why shouldn't I live for myself, like other people? The answer to that question isn't far to seek: because I despise myself and adore her. Adore her!—I wonder what Herbert would say if he heard that. I wonder what he would think I meant by it—I wonder what I do mean by it. I'm sure I can't tell, and I'm even more sure that it doesn't signify. My thoughts are my own, and will continue to be kept to myself, I take it, as they always have been."

Such as they were, his thoughts were no great comfort to him. The unwonted state of excitement into which he had been thrown some hours earlier had passed away and had left him dull and depressed. When he reached the stables the stud-groom, who never missed an opportunity of falling foul of him, remarked sarcastically that he did hope that the next time Mr. Stiles wanted to ride a horse to a standstill he would be so very kind as not to choose a three-hundred-guinea animal.

"The mare is not worth a hundred guineas, and I have not ridden her to a standstill," returned Jacob as he walked away.

He ought to have been accustomed by this time to such small manifestations of spite; but it was his misfortune that he never did become accustomed to them, and his thin skin was pierced a dozen times a day by the minutest of pin-pricks. However, seated in a low wicker chair on the lawn was one who never inflicted wounds, but delighted rather in healing them. He had caught sight of her as he approached the

house, and he made his way towards her now with something of a hurt child's longing to be comforted.

But it is needless to say that no such desire was apparent in his manner, which was as formal as usual. He lifted his hat, saying: "How do you do, Mrs. Herbert?" and Hope started up with a little cry of pleasure.

"Oh! how glad I am that you have come! I was just thinking about you and wondering whether you would be down soon. I am going to begin painting in real earnest now, and I want you to help me, if you will. Go and get a chair for yourself, and tell me all about your experiences in London."

Jacob obeyed her with a kind of sober triumph. She was really glad to see him again, then. To be sure she had mentioned a specific reason for her gladness; but what of that? It was something to be welcome, if only as an instructor, and it was something to be able to put her into good spirits. Her face was bright and smiling now, whereas, on approaching her, he had been struck by the weary dejection expressed in her attitude. He sat down beside her, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of listening to her voice and answering her questions.

"What does it feel like to be a great man?" she asked. "I suppose you don't care a bit; but if I were in your place I should hardly know whether I was standing upon my head or my heels. Doesn't it make you at all proud to think that your name has been in the mouth of every educated person in the three kingdoms this summer?"

"Not very," answered Jacob, smiling. "You see, I might have achieved that much by murdering a man

in a railway-carriage or trying to cross the Channel in a balloon."

"Well, at least you will allow that it is pleasant to be praised by all the best judges of art."

"Yes; that is pleasant, no doubt—if it is the case that I am praised by all the best judges. But," he added, after a short pause, "naturally such things don't mean quite as much to me as they would to most men. I have neither kith nor kin nor friends, and one soon gets tired of gloating over success all by one's self."

Hope protested against his assertion that he had no friends, and he thanked her for her protest, without being convinced by it. "Friendship implies equality," he observed.

"I don't admit that for a moment," rejoined Hope. "Besides, a great artist has no superiors."

They debated this point for a while and then wandered away to other topics. Jacob prolonged the conversation by every means in his power; for he felt a growing reluctance to discharge the commission which he had taken upon himself. At last he drew the note from his pocket and said, without any preface: "I met Captain Cunningham when I was out riding just now, and he asked me to give you this."

He did not look at her as he spoke, not wishing to detect signs of pleasure or embarrassment upon her features. He thought it probable that she would display some such emotion; but he was very far from being prepared for what she actually did. She sprang to her feet, exclaiming "Mr. Stiles!" in a tone which forced him to raise his eyes. Perhaps he looked guilty; at any rate, she thought he did, and her indignation increased.

"If you care at all about the friendship that we were speaking of just now, you will never do such a thing again!" she cried. Then she tore the letter across and across, and threw the fragments away from her.

She had acted upon an angry impulse, and it was not long before she saw what a very foolish thing she had done. Jacob's amazed face and one moment of reflection sufficed to show her that, and she made a desperate and entirely futile effort to recover her lost position, saying, with a forced laugh: "You did not know what a bad temper I have, did you? Captain Cunningham and I had a—sort of quarrel the other day, and I suppose this is a letter of apology. I hate apologies; but I ought not to have torn up his note. Please forget my silly behaviour."

"Of course—of course. It is as if it had never happened," answered Jacob, hardly knowing what he said. "If you and Captain Cunningham quarrelled, I am sure that it was he who was in the wrong; but I will certainly carry no more messages for him."

With characteristic prudence, he stooped and picked up the scraps of paper before the wind bore them away. "Had you not better burn them?" he suggested.

Had he had all his wits about him, he would scarcely have made such a speech; but, fortunately, Hope was quite as much confused as he, and did not perceive the full significance of it. "Yes," she replied, taking the fragments from him hastily—"or rather, no; I had better put them together again and see what he has to say."

It was not until she had regained the house and

her own room that she realised how unequivocally she had betrayed what ought to have remained a profound secret.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK IS QUITE CANDID.

HOPE locked her door and pieced together the torn strips of Bertie's letter, which was a somewhat lengthy one, filling all four sides of a sheet of note-paper. In substance it proved to be much what she had anticipated, and was not badly worded, considering the disadvantages under which the writer must have laboured in composing it. He called himself many bad names, he confessed that his conduct had been utterly inexcusable, and then proceeded to plead the usual excuses. He had tried so hard and so long to conceal the truth; it had been wrung from him in a moment of weakness and overwhelming temptation which no one could regret more deeply than he did. He could not expect that she, whose sense of duty was so strong, should be able to make allowance for an unlucky wretch, who was always doing the things that he ought not to do; nor would he venture to ask for forgiveness. Only he did beg her to consider whether (seeing that his offence could by no possibility be repeated) they might not meet again with an outward show of cordiality. Surely, *for everybody's sake* (these words were heavily underscored), that would be the best and wisest plan; and he would undertake to inflict as little of his society upon her as might be.

There was a good deal more to the like effect, and

when Hope had read it all she was in some degree mollified, feeling that Captain Cunningham had at least expressed himself respectfully and remorsefully. But on a second perusal of his effort she was not quite so well pleased with it. Throughout it there ran a suggestion—not put into words, yet discernible—that it was only her sense of duty that had prevented her from responding to his declaration in a different manner. "Fate has treated us very cruelly," he had written in one place, and had then drawn his pen through the word "us" and substituted "me." She did not like that. And then, again, it was evident that his chief desire was to avoid exposure and scandal. Stripped of its flourishes, the letter simply amounted to this: "I have been very unfortunate and also, if you choose, very culpable; but I shall not shock you by speaking plainly a second time, and therefore I trust that you will have sufficient *savoir vivre* to keep your own counsel and let the matter drop."

She laughed a little bitterly as she destroyed his effusion, to which she resolved to send no reply. The situation out of which she had been disposed to make a tragedy was almost comic, after all. The calm, selfish common sense displayed by all concerned in it, except herself, partly provoked and partly amused her—the former rather more than the latter, perhaps. She had been apprehensive lest her husband should lay violent hands upon the man who had insulted her; yet she had not been altogether pleased by the promptitude of his assurance that he intended doing nothing so unnecessary. Prudence is an excellent quality; but it is not exactly one of the attributes of a hero, and most women prefer men who have a

spice of the heroic in their composition. For Dick there was something to be said, since it had not been with a view to his own comfort alone that he had decided to steer clear of a disturbance; but as for Bertie Cunningham, who had not even the poor courage of his iniquity, and who apparently did not object to being regarded with contempt, so long as the contempt was veiled from the eyes of society, he was a very pitiable creature. That was Hope's deliberate judgment upon him; and probably it was not much less just than the generality of judgments that are delivered publicly and privately in this uneven world.

On the following day Dick left for Portsmouth, after briefly mentioning that it would take him about a week to see to the fitting out of the yacht, and so Hope and Carry were left to entertain one another. This they did to their mutual satisfaction by leaving one another very much alone. It was a fortunate as well as a somewhat singular circumstance that Miss Herbert was not, and never had been, jealous of her sister-in-law. She did not think Hope at all the sort of person who would be likely to fascinate Bertie. His delight, as she had painful reason to know, was in quiet, safe flirtations, and Hope appeared to her to be ignorant of the very first principles of the art of flirting. Bertie would never trouble himself to pay much attention to a woman of that stamp, however great might be her beauty. Moreover, Bertie had taken very good care not to do so when Carry was looking on. Therefore, although at this time she was not a little anxious and disturbed in mind, her anxiety took no aggressive form; nor, when they met, did

Hope find her disagreeable, unwelcome though a good deal of her conversation was.

"I suppose," she remarked interrogatively one day at luncheon, "you don't mean to go yachting with Dick?"

"I have not been asked yet," Hope replied.

"Do you wait for an invitation? If you are so far honoured as to receive one, let me advise you to decline it. Dick isn't a fair-weather sailor; nothing would induce him to go pottering round the coast from regatta to regatta. His notion of enjoyable yachting is being caught in a gale in the Bay of Biscay and having to lie to for forty-eight hours. He is never thoroughly happy unless tons of water are pouring over the decks and cooking anything is quite out of the question."

"Yet I think I remember his telling me that he didn't like stormy weather," observed Hope.

"Ah! that confirms my suspicions. It always seemed to me impossible that any sane being could have such perverted tastes, and as he has never yet taken me out without half drowning me, I presume that his object must have been to disgust me with the sea. Perhaps you have discovered by this time that Dick is not fond of having women about when he is amusing himself."

"You make him out very selfish."

"I never knew a man who was not; only Dick's selfishness is rather more undisguised than other men's. I don't say so to annoy you, you know."

"You do not annoy me in the least," answered Hope, quite truthfully.

Whether her husband was or was not more selfish

than other men, he had convinced her that her company was no addition to his enjoyment, and she had not the least intention of taking part in any cruise that he might be contemplating. Things being as they were, she was inclined to hope that his cruise would be a prolonged one. Nevertheless, she was wholly unprepared for the announcement that he made on his return, after an absence of ten days.

"I'm going to take the yacht across the Atlantic," he said, as coolly as if he had been talking of taking her across the Channel. "Francis and I are bound for Wyoming to shoot wapiti, and we might as well do the voyage comfortably, as we have plenty of time before us. I hate a steamer."

What was implied in shooting wapiti in Wyoming Hope did not quite realise at first; but the thought of the time likely to be consumed in a voyage across the Atlantic under sail rather took her breath away. "You won't be back for some months, then?" she said, with a slight quiver in her voice.

"Well, no. In fact, I suppose I may say that we shan't be back for a year, at least. The winter is out and out the best season for sport in the Rockies, you see. That is, of course, for those who don't mind roughing it a bit. I should never think of taking an untried companion into those parts; but with Francis I know I'm all right. I've seen him in more than one awkward place before now, and I can tell you that he is a good deal tougher than he looks."

But the question of Mr. Francis's toughness or tenderness was one more likely to interest the grizzly bears of the Rocky Mountains than Hope. She paid no heed to, and scarcely heard, the list of that gentle-

man's valuable qualities which Dick now proceeded to unfold, having, indeed, enough to do to hide her consternation and collect her scattered ideas. To conceal emotion is not always the wisest of courses; but it is that which commends itself to most of us at critical moments, and Hope had reasons which, if not good ones, were at least easily comprehensible for wishing to assume an appearance of indifference. That she had reached a crisis in her life she was quite aware—indeed, that was the one thing of which she was clearly conscious in the midst of her anger and bewilderment; and it was only because she did perceive this that she refrained from letting her husband take his own way without a word of expostulation.

“Have you quite decided upon making this expedition?” she asked, as soon as she felt that she could command her voice.

“I have so far decided that I have made most of my arrangements,” answered Dick. “They can be unmade, if necessary; but I have thought it all over carefully, and I believe it is the best thing to do—in every way.”

“It seems to me,” said Hope, “that there are one or two considerations which you can hardly have taken into account. They may not be very important; still, such as they are, they have to be reckoned with. Have you thought, for instance, of the gossip that there will be about your hurrying away for an indefinite time scarcely a year after your marriage?”

Dick shrugged his shoulders. “Oh yes, I have thought of that. It's a bore; but it's unavoidable. Besides, you know, I have the character of being rather

a queer sort of specimen. People won't think it quite so odd in me as they would in anybody else."

"And if they do, you will be a good many thousands of miles away, so that it will not affect you much. I wouldn't have mentioned it, only I fancied that you set rather a high value upon the good opinion of Lady Chatterton and the rest of them. And then, has it not struck you that I shall be a little bit awkwardly placed during your absence?"

"In what way do you mean?"

Hope had a momentary difficulty in replying, so he went on: "I really don't think you will. You will continue to live just as you have done—or rather, you will live differently, if you prefer it. As far as money goes, there will be no difficulty, for I will take care that you shall not be troubled about that, and of course there will be nothing to prevent your going into society and receiving your friends as much as you please."

"I can't agree with you there," answered Hope; "but that is of no consequence." She stopped short rather suddenly. She had several very cutting little speeches at the tip of her tongue; but somehow she could not get them out.

Dick glanced quickly at her. "Look here, Hope," he said, "if you had rather I didn't go, you have only to say so."

"It is not a question of that," she returned. And then, with a slight change of tone, "Go by all means; only I don't quite understand *why* you are going. If it is for the sake of sport, I have nothing more to say; but if it is for any other reason, I think I ought to be told of it."

Dick looked down, frowning a little. "Hadn't we

better assume that it is for the sake of sport?" he asked.

"Why should we assume anything, except the truth? I don't know what you mean. You seem to imply that I have done something wrong and must be punished for it, and you speak as though you were too generous to reproach me. I will not submit to that. If I am to be accused at all, let me be accused openly."

This was by no means what Hope had intended to say when the conversation began; but as her husband's motives for deserting her became more apparent her sense of injury increased, and she felt that she was at least entitled to an explanation.

To so direct a challenge Dick could not refuse to respond; but it was with obvious reluctance that he answered: "I can put things in black and white if you insist upon it; but it seems to me to be needless. There are subjects which are best not entered into between friends."

"That is the exact contrary of what I have always heard you maintain."

"I think not. Certainly there ought to be a clear understanding——"

"Well, there is no understanding in this case. At least, there is none upon my side."

Dick sighed. "All right, then," he said; "I'll be quite candid. It is true that I do want to shoot wapiti and bighorn. I shall like going out there again, and I believe it will do me a lot of good; but of course I shouldn't have thought of this expedition if it hadn't been for what you told me the other day. Under the circumstances, I think it is wiser for me to take myself off for a bit, that's the long and the short of it. I am

very sorry if my leaving you looks to you like an accusation against yourself; but it never occurred to me that you could see it in that light. I told you at the time—and I can do no more than repeat what I said—that you had acted as honourably as it was possible to act; and as for punishment—well, surely you will hardly feel my absence as a punishment.”

He paused and looked questioningly at Hope, who replied, “Your friends will probably think that it is meant so.”

“I assure you they will think no such thing. You make me say what I would much rather not say. When a man goes off to the wilds, as I am going now, is it his wife whom people blame? Don’t they know perfectly well that that would be the last thing he would do if he had any reason to suspect her of being untrue to him? They may say he has been quarrelling with her, and they may call him a selfish brute; but they must either set him down as an absolute idiot or acknowledge that he trusts her entirely. However, as I said before, I am willing to give the whole thing up, if you would prefer my remaining in England.”

“No,” answered Hope slowly; “I should be sorry to deprive you of enjoyment. It was foolish of me to talk of your wanting to punish me; I might have known—but we will say no more about it. It was only because I was a little startled just at first. After all, you are a better judge than I of what people will say, and I daresay you are right in deciding that we should part for a time.”

“I’m sure you’ll agree with me when you have thought it over,” Dick declared, with evident relief. And then, drawing a little nearer to her, “Hope, my

dear," he said kindly, "the beginning and end of the whole business is that we have made a mistake; or, rather, it is I who made the mistake, for you never really wished to marry me. In one sense it is irreparable, because we must continue to be man and wife until one of us dies; but——"

"But we can be so as little as possible."

"That was not what I was going to say," observed Dick.

"But it was what you meant. I wonder whether you would mind telling me something."

"What is it?"

"Only a piece of idle curiosity. Was it Mr. Francis who advised you to go to America?"

"Not he," answered Dick, laughing a little. "On the contrary, he was dead against it—did all he could to make me give the thing up, until he saw that I was determined."

"He did all he could to make you give up the idea of marrying, didn't he?" asked Hope. "If I remember rightly, he was dead against that too."

This Dick could not deny; and Hope resumed: "Well, he will be able to triumph now. He has made no mistake, whatever other people may have done."

But Francis, when he came down to stay at Farn-don—as he did a few days after this—wore anything but a triumphant aspect. He was grave and subdued, spoke little, and gave Hope no opportunity of quarrelling with him, which she had been half prepared to do. She had never liked the man, feeling sure that he had never liked her; nor did his present reserved attitude advance him in her good graces. His face said, as plainly as faces can speak, that he considered

this temporary separation between husband and wife a serious affair, and deplored it as a misfortune for his friend. That he blamed her, Hope was convinced; and she would have been almost better pleased if he had said so openly, instead of sitting silent, listening, observing, and evidently trying to get at the rights of a mysterious matter.

Carry, too, did not behave as might have been anticipated. She heard the news of Dick's impending journey without apparent surprise and with very little in the way of remark; but her manner towards Hope became somewhat softened, and it was easy to see that she pitied her sister-in-law—which was nearly as bad as condemning her. In truth, Hope was rather hard to please at this time. Perhaps the generality of women would have been so in her place, and perhaps, if she was a little petulant every now and then, allowances might very well be made for her.

Allowances were made for her both by Miss Herbert and by Mr. Francis, although neither of them happened quite to understand the nature of her case. They talked it over together one afternoon, when Dick had gone up to London to hurry the tradespeople who were preparing his *impedimenta*, and when Hope, who of late had been testing the value of Tristram's recipe, was hard at work in Jacob Stiles's studio.

"I wish to goodness your brother could be induced to drop this precious scheme of his!" Francis said. "It's all wrong, you know."

Carry made a grimace. "It is what was morally bound to happen. Candidly speaking, I think it is rather too bad of Dick; but there's no use in saying

so. If people will marry nomads, they must be prepared for the natural consequences."

"As far as that goes, when nomads marry, they should be prepared to change their manner of life. But it isn't nomadic instinct that is taking Herbert away from England now."

"Isn't it?" said Carry, raising her eyebrows slightly. "I don't know of anything else that should take him away."

Francis glanced at her with a half-amused, half-puzzled expression. "Do you really mean that?" he asked.

"Certainly I do. There has been no dissension that I am aware of. They are not quite as devoted as they were just after the honeymoon; but that's of course. After all, it isn't an altogether unheard-of thing for a husband to go off on a shooting expedition and leave his wife at home. Hope is annoyed, and I don't wonder at it; most likely I should be annoyed myself if my husband treated me so cavalierly. But then I should never choose a man like Dick for my husband."

Francis was no longer very young. He had lived in the world, with all his faculties of observation on the alert, for a considerable number of years; he knew that nearly all difficulties end by arranging themselves, and that even when they do not, the consequences are seldom tragic. For men and women are only grown-up children, and with the former as with the latter grief, pain, anger, and the rest of the emotions are sure to be followed in due course by consolation and oblivion; it is only a question of substituting weeks or months for hours. Nevertheless, there are exceptions.

There are people—quiet, reticent sort of people, most of them—who never forget, and can't be consoled; and because Francis believed that his friend Herbert was one of these, and also because he was very fond of his friend Herbert, he permitted himself to say what he felt to be an imprudent thing.

"Certainly there is nothing unheard of in a husband leaving his wife for a year or more," he agreed; "I know of many instances in which it has been done. And I know that in several of those instances the result has been calamitous."

Carry laughed. "You may make your mind easy," she said, "Hope is not the kind of woman to fall into calamity."

"But the same thing might have been said in more than one of the cases that I am thinking of."

"You mean that it might have been said by people who didn't know what they were talking about. I have had the privilege of being acquainted with my sister-in-law for a year, and I can assure you that, whatever her failings may be, want of pride is not one of them. Besides, she does not seem to form intimacies readily. The only person to whom she has taken a marked fancy as yet is Jacob Stiles, and I suppose you will hardly call Jacob Stiles dangerous."

Francis held his peace, marvelling inwardly at the obtuseness of a woman who was reputed to be clever and whose infatuation for Cunningham was notorious. It was true that she had not been in London during the past season, and was probably ignorant of a great deal that had been said there; but Cunningham had been at Farndon both before and since, and surely she might have suspected what was no secret among Cun-

ningham's acquaintances. However, since she apparently had not, it was plainly impossible that he should enlighten her.

"You won't try to keep Herbert at home, then?" he said.

"My dear Mr. Francis, do you suppose that Dick would allow himself to be kept at home by me? If anybody could influence him, I should say that it would be you."

"I have used such influence as I have; but there are certain arguments which a man can't employ towards his friend, though a sister might towards her brother."

"So you think that Dick would listen to me if I told him that he had better remain on the spot, lest his wife should elope with some person unknown. I am quite certain that he would not listen to me, and I very much doubt whether you yourself believe in any such danger. Why don't you want him to go? I thought you enjoyed shooting bears and getting frost-bitten and running the risk of losing your scalp."

"I have an impression that we shall not enjoy ourselves this time," answered Francis; "and I have also—I am glad to say—an impression that Mrs. Herbert doesn't much enjoy the prospect of our departure."

"I don't think she does, poor thing!" agreed Carry, with a shade of contempt. "But, as I said before, this was morally bound to happen sooner or later. She will become reconciled to her fate, which isn't such a particularly hard one. I can imagine a worse."

"So can I," said Francis, "but, to tell the truth, it is not so much in her fate that I am interested as in Dick's."

Carry did not in the least understand what he was driving at; but as she felt no special curiosity upon the point, she forbore to question him; and so Francis's forlorn hope that her jealousy might prove more powerful than his eloquence was extinguished.

CHAPTER VII.

FAREWELL!

THE exercise of an art—no matter of what nature it be—is, beyond doubt, one of the surest consolations that are open to afflicted humanity; and Tristram, who had had great troubles in the course of his life and had taken them deeply to heart, had spoken with all the authority of personal experience in insisting so much upon this unquestionable truth. Yet, if he had remembered and related the whole of his experience, he would have had to confess that there had been days during which the panacea had availed him nothing—days of suspense and restlessness and nervous irritation when he had either flung his brushes down in despair or had forced himself to work against the grain, thereby producing bad work, which he knew all the time to be bad, and increasing his misery, instead of allaying it. And this was precisely what now befell Hope. She tried Tristram's panacea in her hour of need, and it failed altogether. Such skill as she once had seemed to have completely deserted her; her drawing was ridiculously faulty, and she found it impossible to fix her mind upon what she was doing. Nor did she derive any comfort from the praise which

Jacob unblushingly lavished upon her worst endeavours. She did him the justice to admit that his insincerity was prompted by kindness and commiseration, and therefore refrained from snubbing him, as she was often sorely tempted to do; but it was hardly in human nature—at any rate, it was not in her nature—to like being commiserated by Jacob. Indeed, what exasperated her beyond everything was the thought that she was in a position to be commiserated at all. Why should she be so sorry that Dick was going away? *He* was not sorry; and even when he was at home, she saw little enough of him now. Moreover, he was no longer what he had been in the early days of their married life. His manner had become formal and reserved; he seemed to consider that she had wronged him, although he had verbally acquitted her of all blame; he had told her unequivocally that their marriage had been a mistake. She ought to be glad to get rid of him, and once or twice she said to herself that she was glad. This assertion, however, was not made more than once or twice. Had she been able to make it to him it might have relieved her; but there was no use in the world in making it to herself, because she knew very well that it was untrue. She knew very well that she would miss him at every turn; she realised—not without some sensation of surprise—how she had learnt to lean upon him, how much she had counted upon his unwearied patience and good temper, and how forlorn she would be without him.

And, after all, she did not yet understand why he was leaving her. As far as she was able to make him out, it was partly because he had become convinced that they were not suited to each other, and partly

because he really had a hankering after sport in the backwoods. He had been pleased to hint—and she had been too proud to contradict him more than once—that she cared for Bertie Cunningham; but he had not seemed to think that it mattered very much if she did. It could scarcely be on that account that he had decided upon an expedition which he had offered to abandon if she desired it. In the depths of her heart she believed that, by speaking a few words, she might induce him to abandon it even now; and, to tell the truth, her chief reason for spending hour after hour in Jacob's studio and sticking doggedly to painting was the fear that she felt lest in a moment of weakness she should be led into saying those words. Better a thousand times that Dick should go than that she should detain him in England against his will and his judgment.

So the long summer days slipped away, while Hope, inwardly tormenting herself with doubts, conjectures, and imaginings, preserved an exterior as impassive as her husband's, while Dick pushed forward his preparations, and while Francis and Carry amused themselves together as best they could—which was not very well. It had been arranged that Francis should stay on until all was ready for a start, and that the two men should leave together. Very soon the date of their departure was fixed, and very soon indeed after that (as it seemed to Hope) the day itself dawned. It found her with an aching head, cold hands, and a heart as heavy as lead. Since her father's death she had never felt so utterly miserable, and when she appeared at breakfast she did not even attempt to assume a cheerful bearing. At that last moment it could

be of very little consequence whether she looked cheerful or not. The others avoided speaking to her; they themselves appeared to be a good deal depressed, and the conversation languished. Even Dick, who had hitherto shown no sign of care, was obviously worried and anxious, and could not manage to eat much.

When they had all risen and were leaving the room, he touched Hope on the elbow and signed to her to follow him into his den. "Just a few last instructions," he said, as he closed the door behind her.

Then he placed a chair for her, sat down beside his writing-table, and, taking up a slip of paper that was lying upon it, began to explain rapidly the provisions that he had made for her expenditure during his absence. The figures struck Hope as being needlessly large.

"I shall never spend anything like that," she said.

"Well, it will be all the better if you don't; but it won't much matter if you do. You need not trouble yourself about it one way or the other. I thought the best plan would be to open a separate account for you at the bank while I was away, and this paper will show you exactly what you will have to draw upon. I have disposed of all the horses that I had in training and I have let a good part of the shooting. There will be quite enough left for any friends whom you may want to ask down in the autumn."

"That sounds like going away for a long time," observed Hope, with a faint smile.

"Oh, I shall be away all the winter, of course." He paused for a moment, stroking his moustache. "There's another thing which ought just to be men-

tioned, perhaps," he resumed presently: "it is on the cards that I may never come back at all."

"Oh, Dick!" ejaculated Hope involuntarily under her breath.

But he went on, without seeming to have heard her interruption: "I have shot a good many grizzlies before now and never been in danger from them to speak of; but they are awkward beasts if you don't happen to kill them quite soon enough and if there isn't a tree handy. Then, again, there is the off chance of being frozen to death or rolling over a precipice and breaking one's neck. None of these things are over and above likely to happen; still, if anything does happen to me, you'll be all right. I have left you everything that I have it in my power to leave, and——"

"How can you talk in that way!" exclaimed Hope, starting up. "Do you think I don't care whether you die or live?"

"I am sure you would be sorry if I died," answered Dick, laughing a little; "I didn't mean to imply a doubt of that. But I shall die none the sooner for having left things ship-shape; and in case I do——"

He stopped; and Hope, with the old feeling of irritation which his speeches were so apt to arouse in her, said, "Well, in case you do, what then?"

"Then I think you may be glad to remember that I wish you to dispose of your future exactly as may seem best to you. I am not going to make any conditions; I won't even offer you a word of advice about it."

"Won't you tell me what you would advise?" asked Hope; for indeed she was somewhat curious to hear.

"No; it might not be what you would like, and

then afterwards it might worry you to disregard it. Well—I think that's about all."

There was a brief space of silence, and then Hope said: "Have you no orders or instructions of any kind to give me? I would so much rather be told exactly what I am to do when I am left alone."

Dick shook his head. "I don't know what you may want to do. I can't tell you to stay here a certain number of months, and move up to London on a particular date, or make out a list of houses that you may stay at and people whom you may ask here."

"But that is just what I should like you to do," said Hope. "I used to wish for independence once—do you remember?—but now that I have got it, I don't think I care much about it. It would really be a kindness if you would let me feel that I have some duty or other to perform. I should find a sort of satisfaction in being able to say to people, 'My husband told me to do this,' or 'My husband said I wasn't to do that.'"

"All right, then; I'll go so far as to say that I would rather you didn't hunt next winter."

"I never dreamt of doing such a thing. Is there nothing else?"

Dick looked meditative. It was pretty clear that there was something else, but that he had not quite made up his mind whether he should mention it or not. He rose and took a turn or two up and down the room with his hands behind his back.

"Won't you tell me?" asked Hope presently.

He seated himself sideways on the table, facing her, and began: "This isn't an instruction, you know, still less an order; it's—what shall I say?—an ex-

pression of opinion. You needn't be guided by it, unless you like. What I was thinking was that perhaps it might be better if you didn't have Cunningham to stay in the house again."

Hope coloured furiously. How could he imagine that she could wish to have Captain Cunningham in the house! For the moment she was unable to find any words to answer him, and he went on, considerately averting his eyes from her face: "I just mention it because I know Carry will want you to ask him, and I doubt whether it would be altogether comfortable for you to have him here. I daresay you know that his battalion has left Windsor."

"I know nothing whatever about it," Hope managed to say, in a rather unsteady voice.

"Yes; they're off to Dublin, and, all things considered, I'm not sorry for it. Now we will say no more upon that subject."

"It is a hateful subject, and I should be only too glad to drop it for ever," returned Hope; "but I wish you at least to believe that nothing would induce me to receive Captain Cunningham as my guest."

"Yes, yes; I quite understand that," said Dick soothingly; and it angered her to see how anxious he was to avoid anything like a scene. "For your own sake, of course, you wouldn't wish to receive him; but Carry will probably press you. In fact, you may be obliged to give in, because you can't bring forward any plausible reason for refusing. All I meant to say was that I wouldn't, if I were you, give in unless it seemed unavoidable. Well; I suppose we ought to be thinking about saying good-bye."

There was a perceptible change in his voice as

he uttered the last sentence. He was evidently apprehensive; and so, for that matter, was Hope. It certainly was nearly time to say good-bye; but how was good-bye to be said? "You need not start yet, need you?" she faltered, more for the sake of gaining a respite and tightening her hold upon herself than from any wish to detain him as long as possible.

Dick looked at his watch. "We have nearly a quarter of an hour," he answered; "but I must say a word or two to Carry before I go—and I shan't see you alone again."

Hope drew a long breath. "Good-bye, then," she said, and held out her hand to him.

He took it in his, and stood looking down upon her for an instant with kindly, rather sorrowful eyes. What he was thinking she could not tell; but she fancied that he, like the others, pitied her, and that was intolerable. She tried to draw away her hand; but he held it fast.

"How cold you are!" he exclaimed. "What business have you to be cold on such a fine, hot day?" And then, suddenly—"Why, Hope, what is it? My dear girl, you mustn't distress yourself like this."

For Hope had broken down altogether, in spite of her determination to be calm and dignified and to spare him the scene which she knew that he dreaded. She was trembling from head to foot, and the tears filled her eyes, brimmed over, and ran down her cheeks. "I don't want you to go!" she gasped, pitiously. "I don't want you to go and—and be killed by grizzly bears!" And then she burst out laughing at herself and could not stop, though her laughter was broken by sobs.

Dick laughed too. "What nonsense!" he exclaimed, cheerfully; and if there was a slight tremor in his own voice, Hope was far too agitated to notice it. "I ought not to have said anything about the grizzlies. They are very much more likely to be killed by me than I am to be killed by them, I can assure you. In fact, we are not undertaking what anybody could call a dangerous expedition, and we shall be back again before you know where you are. A year is soon over."

Hope shook her head despairingly. "I don't think so—I think a year is an immense time. Besides, you said it might be more than a year. *Must* you go, Dick?"

"Oh yes," he answered hastily but decisively, "I must go now; it is too late to change our minds. And we should regret it if we did; I am sure of that. You are upset just now; but afterwards you will see it was the best thing to do." He bent down over her and kissed her forehead. "Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you!" he said. Then he turned and made as though he would have left the room; but Hope clung to his arm.

"You will write to me, won't you, Dick?" she asked.

"What a question! Of course I will, and I'll telegraph as soon as we reach New York. You must write to me too—when you're inclined, you know—and tell me all you are doing. We shall not be able to write or receive letters very regularly; but I'll keep the communications open as well as I can. When you don't hear, you may take it for granted that we are all right. If any misfortune happens, the news will reach you fast enough. Now I really ought to go and look for Carry."

As soon as he had effected his escape Hope reso-

lutely swallowed down her tears. She had still a short time left in which to compose herself, and she dismissed from her mind every consideration except the paramount one of presenting a moderately creditable appearance at the last moment. When once the dog-cart should have driven away she would be at liberty to go to her own room and indulge her grief as much as she pleased. And so, when she emerged into the hall, the inquisitive eyes of the servants assembled there discovered nothing more than that she had been crying; and that they probably thought only decent, under the circumstances. The sunshine was streaming through the open door, where Dick, Francis, and Carry were standing; beyond them Hope could see the red wheels of the dog-cart.

"Oh, there you are!" called out Dick, who was lighting a cigar. "I was just going to send for you. Now, Francis, you might as well jump in; we haven't too much time. Good-bye, everybody; pray for easterly breezes, and don't flatter yourselves that we have gone to the bottom of the sea if you hear nothing of us for a month." He had assumed a brisk, bustling demeanour which sat rather oddly upon him. "Where's Jake?" he asked suddenly. "Run and look for him, somebody. Confound the fellow! what does he mean by hiding himself?"

A footman darted upstairs and presently returned, casting indignant glances over his shoulder at Jacob, who followed him with swift, noiseless steps. Dick had already climbed into the dog-cart. He bent down, stretching out his hand to the young man, who stood bareheaded in the sunshine.

"Good-bye, Jake," Hope heard him say. "Don't

get made President of the Royal Academy before I come back, because I should like to assist at the inaugural banquet. In the meantime, if you want novelty in the way of subjects, you had better come out to Denver or Cheyenne and ask for us. We are sure to be somewhere or other within a thousand miles or so, and I dare say you'll find us, if you look about."

This good-humoured jocular, which seemed to be a little forced, provoked no responsive smile upon Jacob's grave and rather sullen countenance. "I hope you will have good sport," he said shortly, and drew back without another word.

Then Dick gathered up the reins, the groom sprang back from the horse's head, and in another moment the dog-cart was bowling down the avenue at a smart pace, while Hope, motionless in the doorway, stood gazing after it. Carry said something about its being unlucky to watch people out of sight; but in spite of that remonstrance she remained where she was until Dick, having reached the point at which the road branched off at right angles, waved his hat as a last farewell, and so vanished.

Hope turned round and found that she was alone. Carry had gone back into the house, as had also Jacob and the servants. Before following their example, she looked out once more at the broad, sunny landscape, the air quivering with the heat, the bright-coloured flower-beds, with the butterflies hovering over them, and the undulating park beyond; and as she looked, the memory of her first morning at Farndon came vividly back to her. How long ago that seemed! and what a change had come over her life in one brief year! Assuredly it had been with no extravagant anti-

cipations of happiness that she had started; but she had thought that a peaceful, easy, and not unpleasant sort of existence lay before her, and she remembered to have made some good resolutions which she had tried to keep. Whose fault was it that the whole business had ended in utter, irremediable failure? How had it come to pass that two people who had married without illusions, and with what had appeared to be a perfect mutual understanding, had so soon been reduced to the dismal and almost ludicrous shift of placing the Atlantic Ocean between them? Somebody, surely, must be to blame for such a state of things. And yet, perhaps, nobody was exactly to blame, and the catastrophe was the natural outcome of a marriage contract entered into upon those terms. What did not strike Hope as odd was the fact that she should consider what had happened a catastrophe at all. Dick had said from the very first that he would probably be a good deal away from home; and that much Hope might have recollected (although for the moment she did not); because it is easy enough for people who have tolerably good memories to recall matters of fact. But, on the other hand, there is nothing in the world more difficult to realise or even believe in than a state of feeling which has passed away; and that is why Hope, after she had mounted the stairs to her bedroom, with her slow, dragging step, and had locked the door behind her, flung herself down upon a sofa and gave way to despair.

"Oh, Dick!" she moaned aloud, "how could you be so cruel to me—how could you leave me, when I love you so?"

It was the first time that she had made this con-

fession to herself in so many words, and the sound of it startled her a little, though she had been vaguely conscious of the truth for some time past. Of course she loved him. She had loved him all along—certainly ever since her marriage: perhaps even before. It was because she loved him that his placid good-humour had so provoked her, and that she had sometimes assailed him with sharp speeches; it was because she loved him that she had so bitterly resented his insinuation that she could care for Bertie Cunningham; it was because she loved him, and knew that he had only a lukewarm sort of friendship for her, that she had refrained from entreating him to abandon this journey, from which he might never return. She saw it all now, but, of course, even if she had seen it sooner, she could not have acted otherwise than as she had done. What use or object would there have been in keeping him by her side, knowing all the time that he preferred the society of trappers and Red Indians to hers? And then she remembered, with a sharp twinge of jealousy, that he had admitted having been in love once. He was just the sort of man who would be incapable of falling in love a second time.

“And I don’t believe he even feels the friendship for me that he used to feel,” murmured poor Hope. “He thinks we are not suited to each other and that we have made a mistake, and he is sorry for me—that is all.”

So she lay there with clenched fingers and dry eyes, saying to herself, as young people are so apt to do when the world goes ill with them, that there was nothing to look forward to now but death.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GENEROUS OFFER.

THAT the fascinations of Dublin society are very great is what no Sassenach, however bigoted, will venture to deny; yet, if a man's chief interests happen to be centred in London and its vicinity, also if he be fully persuaded in his own mind that only one small section of society is really worthy of his attention, he cannot suffer transplantation without a wrench, and the officers of Her Majesty's Foot Guards are, perhaps, a little too much given to indulge in complaints and murmurings when they are despatched across St. George's Channel. This makes it the more gratifying to be able to state that the battalion to which Captain Cunningham belonged afforded one conspicuous exception to the above rule, in the person of Captain Cunningham himself.

Bertie had, indeed, reasons for congratulating himself upon his change of quarters, of which his anxiety to be removed from the neighbourhood of Farndon was only one—though doubtless the chief. He had been profoundly mortified—and almost as much puzzled as mortified—by the indignant contempt with which Hope had received his avowal of love. Nothing of that kind had ever happened to him before; no one had ever addressed such language to him (though he had given more than one person an excellent excuse for so doing), and he could not quite understand it. Of course he had done wrong. He had said what ought not to have been said; he had broken his resolution, and, in a

severely literal sense, he had certainly insulted the woman whom he loved. But he could not help being astonished that she should say or think so. When the days passed on, bringing him no acknowledgment of his apology, he felt that he was being punished with almost vindictive rigour, and although his love for Hope was not diminished by what he considered her needless cruelty, it was a great relief to him to be ordered to a city in which he would run no risk of chance encounters with her. He was glad, too, to be out of Carry's reach; and, again, he was glad to be out of the reach of his friend Mrs. Pierpoint; finally, he was very glad to be out of the reach of duns.

This security, it is true, was rather apparent than real; for Dublin, after all, is not so very far away, and the postal service which connects it with the metropolis is admirably organised. If Bertie had lost sight of the above circumstance, he was speedily reminded of it. In fact, he had not been a week in Ireland when he received by one and the same delivery a batch of most disquieting letters. He was a man who habitually received a great many letters, of which a fair proportion were rather pleasant than otherwise, and it was his sensible rule always to read the disagreeable ones first. When, therefore, he recognised his father's handwriting upon one of the envelopes, he unhesitatingly accorded to it the place of honour, and its contents fully justified his discrimination.

Sir Robert Cunnigham was afflicted with a large family, a large estate, a moderate rent-roll, and a short temper. His younger sons had been no sort of comfort to him, and when he could get hold of them he took good care to make things excessively uncomfortable

for them in return. Therefore they usually skipped nimbly out of his way, and, as he detested letter-writing, he only communicated with them when under the influence of great exasperation. Such an influence had evidently been strong upon him when he sat down to indite the epistle which our friend Bertie was now perusing. The old gentleman's style was terse and vigorous. He wasted no space in prefatory remarks, but came straight to the point:—

“DEAR BERTIE [he wrote],—What the devil do your confounded tailors and saddlers mean by sending in their bills to me? Even you can hardly be such an ass as to think that I shall pay them. I am not going to be bothered in this way, and if anything of the kind occurs again I shall cut £ 100 a year off your allowance to teach you better manners. Since I am writing to you, I may as well mention that I am not half pleased with what I have been hearing about you lately. I understand that you are still playing fast and loose with a lady whom report says that you might have married, and ought to have married, any time during the last year, or more. If you choose to throw away an ample income, that is your affair; you are free to please yourself. But you are not free to behave in a manner unbecoming a gentleman, and rumours have reached my ears of an entanglement connected with this affair which strikes me as highly discreditable. You had better take this as a warning and mind what you are about; for, as sure as I am alive, I will stop your allowance altogether if you disgrace yourself; and from what I know of you, you will hardly enjoy supporting yourself by manual labour.”

A truly sickening missive! Bertie tossed it aside with a grimace, and proceeded to a further examination of his correspondence. The next letter on the list was from Mr. Abraham Levison, financial agent; and Mr. Abraham Levison said that this would never, never do! Such leniency as he had shown to Captain Cunningham was without a parallel in the whole history of his benevolent career. Probably there was no man in London or elsewhere who would have lent money upon terms so absurdly easy; certainly there was no other who would have displayed such boundless patience. But to everything there must be an end. Business was business; and unless Captain Cunningham would consent to be a little more businesslike—etc., etc. Then came a politely-worded but decisive request from a well-known firm of West End hosiers. Captain Cunningham's account had now been running on for upwards of five years, and they were compelled reluctantly to demand immediate payment. A Windsor tradesman was less urbane:—"I can't stand it no longer, nor yet I won't stand it. You must settle, Captain, and look sharp about it too, or I'll have the law of you, and that's flat."

After running his eye over several other intimations similar in character and more or less peremptory in tone, Bertie felt himself in a fit frame of mind to read a somewhat bulky letter which he had already recognised as coming from Miss Herbert. "I wonder what *she* has got to say! Possibly she, too, may have decided to 'have the law of me' if I am not more businesslike," he murmured, with a dreary little laugh.

However, Carry's did not prove to be a threatening letter. It was written, as her letters always were, in a

style expressive rather of good fellowship than of tender sentiments, and it conveyed the news—somewhat startling to its recipient—of Dick's sudden disappearance from the scene. "I am really quite ashamed of him," his sister declared, "and I can't help being sorry for poor Hope, though she is rather a goose, in my opinion. Ever since he left, she has been going about with a face as long as your arm, and making the most piteous and futile efforts to look as if nothing was the matter. I have done my little best to console her, but have only got snubbed for my pains. However, I won't run her down, for I am aware that you have looked upon her as an angel since you broke your leg, and she read good books to you. By the bye, did she read good books to you? But I am sure she did; and you are just the man to delight in that kind of thing when stretched upon a bed of sickness. For my own part, I only wish she *were* an angel—at least, I wish she had wings. In that case she would doubtless take flight for Wyoming, and I might ask a few cheery people to stay. As things are at present, the house is about as gay as my own house in Yorkshire used to be when it wasn't my own house, and when poor old Aunt Anne was laboriously keeping herself alive with tea-kettles."

At this point Bertie laid down the sheet and became lost in meditation. Why was Hope's face so long, and why was she inconsolable? Assuredly not because her husband had gone away. He had seen too much of their daily relations to believe that either of them had more than a sober sort of liking for the other. And then, again, what did Herbert mean by rushing off to the other side of the world at a moment's notice? But, not being good at solving problems, and being

really convinced that Hope's character was an angelic one, he soon ceased to perplex himself, murmuring with a sigh: "Well, it can't make much odds to me, anyhow; I have done for myself completely and finally, and I don't suppose she will ever forgive me. Even if she loved me as I love her, she would die before she would admit it."

Then he returned to Carry's letter, which he had left at the end of a page; and the first words that met his eye, on turning over the next one, caused him to give a low whistle. "As I am doing no good here," she continued, "and as I am bored beyond all power of words to describe, I have decided on trying the effect of a little change. There is nothing in the world that I abhor quite so much as yachting; yet I am going to yacht. The Fortescues have invited me to go on a cruise to the west coast of Scotland with them, and I am to join them at Kingstown in a day or two. I had not the courage to go all the way from Southampton in the yacht, as they wanted me to do. You must come on board and see us, and tell us how you are getting on in Paddyland. The name of the yacht is the *Flying Scud*—painfully suggestive; but I presume that she will at least refrain from flying and scudding while she is in Kingstown Harbour."

Bertie felt that the Fates were closing in upon him. Duty and indebtedness; an angry and determined father; duns not less angry and determined; a lady whose determination yielded in nothing to theirs, although as yet she did not appear to be angry—these, surely, formed an encircling host powerful enough to make any harassed young man yield at discretion and say: "Have it your own way, then!" Bertie was very

much disposed to adopt that inglorious course. After all, it was nothing but what he had known and declared to be inevitable for a long time past. Yet, when he thought of Hope, and pictured to himself the look of disdain which would come over her face on hearing that he had engaged himself to her sister-in-law, he exclaimed aloud, "No: hang it! I can't. I'd rather chuck up everything and emigrate to New Zealand or some such place. Other fellows have done it, and why shouldn't I? Though, as the governor so amiably remarks, manual labour is not exactly the kind of thing that I am likely to enjoy."

He smiled slightly, looking down at his hands. They were well-shaped, strong little hands, and could do all that their owner desired of them with a gun or a cricket-bat or a pair of sculls; but whether they could be employed with success upon ploughs and spades was another question. In his heart of hearts Bertie probably knew very well that he would never put them to any such use; but for the next few days—until the *Flying Scud* came into harbour, in fact—he amused himself with speculating upon the prospects of a colonial career, and even went so far as to buy two or three books relating to New Zealand and glance through their pages. Then, one morning, a note reached him from Mrs. Fortescue, a lady with whom he was well acquainted, asking him to lunch on board, and casually mentioning that his "friend Miss Herbert" had arrived. An excuse might have been invented without difficulty; but it was less troublesome to accept; and when Bertie had more than one course open to him, he invariably and upon principle chose the least troublesome.

The *Flying Scud* was a large schooner of nearly

three hundred tons, and when Captain Cunningham stepped on to her deck, he found himself surrounded by quite a considerable group of friends, of whom Carry, in a neat yachting costume, was one. They were very glad to see him, for he was universally liked, and he, too, was glad to see them and hear what they had to tell him about the world, from which he considered himself to be cut off; so that in a very short time the memory of his various troubles faded away from his mind. It was only when his eyes met Carry's, as they did from time to time, that a vague feeling of apprehension came over him.

After luncheon the company dispersed with some suddenness. The owner of the yacht went ashore, taking the greater part of his guests with him; others went out fishing; thus it came to pass that Bertie, who was reclining in a wicker chair beneath the awning and enjoying a cigarette, looked round and discovered that his only companions were Mrs. Fortescue and Miss Herbert.

"Now, Captain Cunningham," said the former, "you can't be allowed to be lazy any longer. Do you understand sailing a boat?"

"Of course I do," answered Bertie.

"Then you shall take us out in the cutter. There is just enough breeze to fill the sail, and the water is smooth enough even for Carry."

Bertie said that would be very jolly; but he was not quite so sure about the jollity of it when the two ladies, who had gone below to make some change in their dress, reappeared, and when Mrs. Fortescue announced that, after all, she had decided to remain on board, having rather a headache and being afraid

of the sun. "I daresay you can be trusted not to drown Carry or yourself," she added.

The truth was that Mrs. Fortescue, like a good many other well-meaning persons, wished to do something towards bringing about the engagement which had been hanging fire for so long.

Carry Herbert was a proud woman by nature, and it was not without a sense of humiliation that she seated herself in the centre-board cutter which had been brought alongside, while Bertie took the tiller. Not for the first time, she asked herself whether any subsequent happiness could quite repay her for this persistent hunting down of an unwilling victim. Had she not felt sure that the victim must eventually fall a prey to some well-dowered lady, she would have been almost inclined to abandon the pursuit; but that gave her a sort of justification. "He will never care much for anybody," she sometimes thought (for she was not in the least blind to his defects); "and I believe he is fond of me, after a fashion." But just now a fit of compunction and discouragement was upon her, so that she leant over the gunwale, resting her chin upon her hand and half turning her back towards her companion, who, for his part, could find nothing particular to say.

A very light breeze blew from the land and tempered the heat of the sun. The boat glided gently seaward before it, leaving a long track upon the smooth water, and for some time neither of its occupants uttered a word. They were sufficiently intimate to remain silent, if it so pleased them; sufficiently intimate also to understand one another without explicit speech; and so when Carry at length turned round

and said "Well?" there was no need for her to add anything to that curt interrogation.

"It isn't well at all," answered Bertie; "it's about as far from being well as it can be."

"What is wrong now?"

"Oh, the old thing—bills."

"Which kind of bills?"

"Both kinds. The finish isn't far off now, I give myself six months more—unless Dutch Oven wins the Leger, in which case it is just wildly possible that I might hold out for another year."

"And then?"

"And then I shall go off to New Zealand, if the governor will consent to pay my passage. Or perhaps I'll drive a hansom cab—I don't know. Will you give me an occasional half-crown fare during the season?"

Carry made no reply. She had shifted her position, and was gazing at the beautiful Bay of Dublin astern, and the shipping in the harbour, and the great mail-steamer from Holyhead, which had just come in. Her profile was turned towards Bertie—a very handsome, high-bred profile. Just now it wore a somewhat softer and sadder expression than usual, and, as he looked at it, he felt a little sorry and a little ashamed. Poor Carry! he certainly had not treated her well. There had been a time when the idea of marrying her had been by no means repugnant to him, and even now—but then the vision of another face seemed to rise between him and her, and he said to himself, No, by Jove! he couldn't do it. How extraordinary it was that she should never have suspected the truth! It was partly curiosity, partly perversity, that moved him to say: "Tell me about Mrs. Herbert. Is she really

unhappy at being parted from that long-legged, unromantic brother of yours?"

"Oh yes," answered Carry absently. "Why not?"

"Only because she never seemed to me to be much interested in him. When I was at Farndon they were always apart all day long."

"I suppose that was because she saw that he didn't want her. Most women can conceal their feelings, and all women ought to be able to do so."

The last words were spoken with an accent of bitterness which Bertie understood. He relapsed into silence once more, not being yet prepared to say what he knew that he was almost bound to say. Would it be possible for him, he wondered, to escape from that boat without having finally committed himself? If he had cared to fathom his feelings, he would perhaps have discovered that what he really wanted was to be so placed as that this should not be possible. He would be glad afterwards to be able to make excuses for himself—to say: "Well, I couldn't help it; no fellow could have got out of such a situation without proposing."

Thus he waited upon events, drifting, as the boat drifted when the breeze died away and the sail flapped against the mast. Carry seemed to be not less devoid of definite purpose than he. She made a remark from time to time, to which he responded, but for the most part they held their peace. It has already been said that they knew one another well enough to exchange thoughts with a minimum of speech. The two hands whom they had brought with them from the yacht were half-asleep in the bows, and were no restraint upon such conversation as passed between them. Nor did

the presence of these drowsy sailors prevent Carry from saying something at last which she certainly would not have liked them or any one else to overhear. They had now been a long time in the boat, and were beating back towards the harbour against a westerly wind which had freshened somewhat. Without any introductory observations, Carry reverted to the subject upon which she had been meditating the whole afternoon.

"You can't go on like this," she said. "You can't always spot the winners of races——"

"One in twenty is about my average," interjected Bertie.

"And there is not the remotest chance that Dutch Oven will win the Leger. Besides, if she did, that would mean no more than staving off ruin for another twelvemonth. The only plan is to free yourself from debt and make a fresh start. I want you to let me provide you with the means of doing this. Don't interrupt, please; I'm quite aware that one isn't allowed to do that sort of thing for one's friends; but mine is a rather exceptional case. The simple truth is that I have a great deal more money than I can possibly spend, and you couldn't do me a greater kindness than by letting me help you. I could give you £5000, or even double that, to-morrow, and nobody would be any the wiser. That's the point of it, you see; nobody would ever know."

She spoke in a low, eager voice, and the young man was really touched by her disinterestedness, which he could not question. Still, there was only one answer to be made.

"You are very kind and very generous," he said, "and I am as grateful to you as if it were possible for

me to accept your offer. But you must see that it is utterly impossible. No man can take money from a woman, unless—except——”

“The matter is one between ourselves,” she interrupted quickly. “I see no necessity for conditions. Did you think that I wanted to impose any upon you?”

“I am sure you didn’t,” answered Bertie. And then, after a pause: “But the conditions exist, all the same.”

If he had really wished to find himself in a position from which retreat without an offer of marriage would be impracticable, he should have been satisfied now; and if poor Carry had ever doubted that he would like her money well enough, but was not equally ambitious to become possessed of her person, his present hesitation must have removed all doubt from her mind. She was mortified, but her magnanimity did not desert her.

“We won’t say any more about it now,” she resumed presently. “Think it over, and let me know to-morrow or next day what you decide. I only ask you to believe that it will be a true act of friendship on your part to let me be of use to you, and that, if you do, I shall never dream of thinking that I have laid you under an obligation of any sort or kind.”

Bertie murmured some confused words of thanks. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself for taking advantage of this delay, but he did take advantage of it, notwithstanding. Everybody knows the consequences of craning at a fence or pausing upon the point of taking a header. If the thing is not done at once, it will most probably never be done at all, and Bertie had shivered upon the brink so long that he was ready to catch at any excuse for shivering a little longer. He

would, of course, have to make his proposal in due form on the morrow, and his only reason for not making it immediately was that to-morrow was to-morrow. A poor reason enough; but it served its purpose.

Bertie did not linger on board the yacht after he had restored Miss Herbert, safe and sound, to Mrs. Fortescue's care, and had been discreetly rallied by that lady upon the length of time that he had been absent. He ascertained that the *Flying Scud* would not sail for a couple of days, and, having promised to call again, took his leave.

"So it's all settled," he mused, when he had been put on shore and was waiting at the station for a train to take him to Westland Row. "At least, it will be before I am twenty-four hours older, and I only wish the twenty-four hours were past! I ought to have done it this afternoon, but I couldn't, somehow. It was awfully good of her to offer me that money, and she meant what she said too. Upon my word, she's a long way too good for me, and if I could only forget Hope—but the worst of it is that I shall never do that, and I shall never dare to look her in the face again either. Suppose anything should happen to Herbert out in America—no, dash it all! I won't think about such things; I'll think about Carry. I wonder whether I shall have to tell her that I love her, and I wonder whether she will believe me, if I do. Poor Carry! Poor me, too, if you come to that! Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and I suppose the governor will dance a fandango when he hears the news. So will old Levison; and so will the butcher and the baker and the candlestick-maker. What a consolation it will be to make so many deserving people happy!"

His soliloquy was interrupted by a tap on the shoulder, and, wheeling round, he became aware of a young brother-officer whose ordinarily impassive countenance had an expression of modified joy and excitement. "Well," said Bertie, rather crossly, "what's up with *you*? You look as if you had discovered something to be cheerful about in this beastly hole."

"I'm going to leave this beastly hole," answered the other. "Haven't you heard? We're ordered off to Egypt to join Wolseley's expedition."

Bertie drew a long breath. "There's a fate about this," he muttered. "Providence doesn't mean the event to come off, that's certain. First I break my leg; then what the governor calls an 'entanglement' arises; and now I am sent away to chastise Arabi the Blest—may his shadow never be less! One more chance for me—lots more chances! Who can tell what may not happen before I come back? Who knows whether I shall come back at all?"

"I can't hear a word you say," interrupted his companion.

"I wasn't talking to you, my dear fellow," answered Bertie; "but you're a good sort of chap in your way, and you've brought me good news. I won't fail to drink your health the moment I get within reach of decent liquor."

And so, on the following day, Carry waited for Captain Cunningham in vain; but the evening post brought her the subjoined brief note:—

"MY DEAR MISS HERBERT—I daresay you won't have been surprised at my not turning up this afternoon; I have such a heap of things to do. You will have heard

that we are to sail for Egypt immediately. It will be awfully hot, I expect; but one mustn't grumble at trifles. I hope you will have a pleasant cruise. You must write and tell me about it, and I'll send you a graphic account of our first engagement in return. Very sorry I couldn't see you to say good-bye; but we shall meet again before next year most likely, unless I get knocked over.—Yours very sincerely,
B. C."

"I can't tell you how grateful I feel to you for what you said yesterday. I did think it over, as you told me; but of course I couldn't say yes to such an offer. Nobody could. Thank you a thousand times for making it, though."

CHAPTER IX.

A QUIET TIME.

THE old hypothesis that of every pair of lovers there is one who loves and one who submits to be loved has often suggested an inquiry as to which of the two lots is the more desirable; but this would not for a moment have presented itself in the light of a problem to Hope, who soon got the better of the access of despair which had come upon her in the first hour of her abandonment. She had no doubt at all that it was a happier fate to love an indifferent husband than to be an indifferent wife; perhaps, too—since her nature was so sanguine—she may sometimes have indulged in dreams of a good time coming, when Dick should be indifferent no longer. In any case, it was a joy to her to be able to think of him in the way that she had

always unconsciously wished to think and had as unconsciously resisted; it was a joy to her to make a hero of him, to absolve him from all blame, to forgive him freely for having forsaken her and spoken of their marriage as a mistake. She had, it is true, a momentary difficulty when she remembered his suspicions of her with regard to Bertie Cunningham and his implied disbelief of her word upon the subject; but she swallowed that down with the rest. She could not grudge anything to those whom she loved, and if Dick had done her a much more grievous wrong, she would have found pleasure in pardoning him. Therefore she was far from being altogether miserable, in spite of the long face which Carry had accused her of wearing: only her spirits were depressed, and she allowed her mind to dwell more than was good for her upon the perils of the ocean, and upon wild Indians and bears and frost-bites and rattlesnakes.

When Carry, somewhat unexpectedly, took her departure, Hope, glad to be left to her own devices, inaugurated the humdrum course of life which she purposed to lead until her husband's return. Solitude was much more agreeable to her than society, and she neither desired nor intended to invite any one to stay with her. One guest, however, thought fit to invite himself. This was Mr. Lefroy, who wrote to ask whether his niece would take him in for a night on his way from home to some place in the Eastern counties, where he had to attend a Conservative gathering. Hope could only answer that he would be most welcome, and was thankful that he was not going to bring his better half with him. Lady Jane had been greatly startled by the intelligence of Dick's flight for America.

Hope had purposely abstained from letting her know of it until it was already an accomplished fact, and her ladyship's reply, though guardedly expressed, had borne the impress of consternation in every line. She evidently thought that there had been a quarrel, and it was quite clear that she had now despatched Mr. Lefroy to inquire into and report upon the causes of the same. This was tiresome; but it was nothing more than Hope had anticipated, and she was prepared with answers to any questions that might be put to her.

Mr. Lefroy, when a young man, had thought of entering the Diplomatic service, and it is almost a pity that his ample means and love of rural pursuits caused him to give up the idea; for he possessed many of the qualities which go to make a successful diplomatist of the Britannic variety. He had plenty of common sense; he knew how to stick to a point and to make his interlocutor do the same; he was not easily humbugged, and his good-humoured heartiness was calculated to disarm suspicion. Personally, he was a good deal more alarmed about his niece's domestic affairs than Lady Jane was, and considered that matters had taken a very serious turn indeed. His impression of Hope was what he had proclaimed it to be on her wedding-day: he thought that she required extremely careful driving, and he had never felt sure that Dick Herbert was the man to keep her head straight. He believed her capable of great acts of folly—so much so, indeed, that to hear of her elopement with Bertie Cunningham would not have surprised him.

Therefore it was with an anxious heart, though with a smiling and open countenance, that he accosted her on his arrival at Farndon, and took note of a cer-

tain change in her appearance which was not satisfactory to him. "Pale cheeks, features a little drawn and sharp—that's worry," he thought to himself. "But what the deuce does that queer sort of subdued glow in her eyes mean? I'm afraid I know only too well what it means. I've seen it in other people's eyes before now."

It was really very creditable to him that he should have detected this phenomenon, which would have escaped the notice of nine observers out of ten; and that it could be due to Hope's tardy discovery that she was in love with her husband was what no diplomatist, however acute, could be expected to surmise.

Mr. Lefroy was very diplomatic. He neither rushed into his subject nor ostentatiously avoided it, but remarked: "So that rascal Dick is off after the big game again, eh? You can't keep him from it, any more than you can keep a terrier from poaching. Ah, well! I wish I was young enough to take a turn at the wapiti myself." After which he glided airily away to other topics of conversation. He fully intended to speak plainly, for he deemed that this was a case in which plain speaking would be of service; but he proposed to put off what he had to say until the last thing at night, knowing that emphatic words are apt to lose much of their force unless they are followed up by an exit. But when he was sitting with Hope in the drawing-room after dinner, and when the evening paper, which had just arrived, was handed to him, his eye lighted upon a paragraph which not only caused him to modify his programme, but drew from him a fervent ejaculation of "The Lord be praised!"

Hope looked up from her work interrogatively. "Why?" she asked.

Mr. Lefroy did not reply "Because the sixth battalion of the Scots Guards are under orders for Egypt," but said somewhat hastily: "I am rejoicing over the discomfiture of this pious Ministry, which is about to lay itself open to further charges of bloodguiltiness. They will be driven into annexation, you'll see: and that is satisfactory, because Egypt must belong to England eventually; but they will also have to spend a good many millions of the public money, and then up will go the income-tax and out will go the Government, which will be more satisfactory still. We may hope to get rid of them now before they bring in their abominable County Franchise Bill."

"But isn't the County Franchise Bill one of the things which are bound to come eventually?" asked Hope.

"Very likely; and we are all bound to die eventually; but I take it that none of us wants to hasten that event. I should like to destroy Radicalism altogether, but that is impossible; so I am thankful for any opportunity that occurs of scotching it. Believe me, the golden rule in politics and in life is to make the best of things."

"You say that as if you intended the rule to apply specially to me," observed Hope.

"I have not the slightest objection to admitting that such was my intention. I think you are discontented with your lot, and I think you might be worse off—a great deal worse off."

Hope was not sure that she quite understood his drift; but she knew that he would not have come to

Farndon to protest against mere discontent on her part, so she led him on by saying: "I should have thought that it was only right and proper for a wife to be discontented when her husband leaves her for a year."

"Oh, well, I agree with you there; I don't think Herbert ought to have done it. But candidly now, Hope—are you any more contented when he is at home?"

Hope laid down her work and looked her uncle in the face calmly: "What is it that you are afraid of my doing?" she asked.

Mr. Lefroy hesitated and then laughed a little. "Perhaps I had better tell you," he said. "I am not afraid of your doing anything wrong" (this was not quite strictly true, but diplomatists must be courteous and are absolved by common consent from absolute veracity), "only I am sometimes afraid—and so is your aunt—that you may be inclined to look in the wrong direction for consolation. I quite allow that it is hard lines upon a woman that, because she is young and good-looking, she should be debarred from friendships with men who—who—in short, who resemble her in those particulars; but we live in a censorious world, and, as I say, we must make the best of it. Now, young Cunningham——"

"Captain Cunningham is not a friend of mine," interrupted Hope.

"Eh?"

"He is not a friend of mine. I liked him at first; but I have not found him improve upon acquaintance, and you may tell Aunt Jane that he certainly will not be invited to stay here during Dick's absence. I suppose that was what you were afraid of, was it not?"

Perhaps it had been; but as Bertie would probably be employed for some time to come in supporting the dignity and independence of the Khedive, that cause for alarm no longer existed. Therefore Mr. Lefroy replied: "Not exactly. Your aunt, I think, would rather wish to caution you against forming intimacies with any young men just at present."

"Then tell her that she shall be obeyed. And you may add, if you like, that I am not nearly so discontented with my lot as you and she imagine. Now are you satisfied?"

Mr. Lefroy stroked his chin meditatively. What he was thinking was: "If it isn't Cunningham, who the deuce is it? It must be somebody." But as he could not say this he resumed presently: "I really am quite ashamed of being so inquisitorial, but would you mind telling me one thing? What did Herbert go away for?"

"To shoot wapiti, apparently."

"Oh yes, apparently, only nobody is likely to believe it. Now, Hope, don't you know that he would come back at once, if you wrote and asked him?"

"I most certainly do not know anything of the kind—or I would write."

"You might try the experiment, anyhow."

"No," answered Hope, with a slight smile, "I won't do that; but I will promise to form no new friendships while he is away, if that will do as well. The moment that you think I am becoming too intimate with anybody you will only have to tell me so, and that person shall be dropped. Can I say more?"

Mr. Lefroy was fain to admit that she could not. He professed himself satisfied and left the next morning, after taking an affectionate farewell of his niece,

and extorting from her a somewhat reluctant promise to pay a long visit to Helston in a few weeks' time. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied, and as he drove down to the station he muttered to himself: "All very fine; but what about that queer light in her eyes? If she isn't in love with somebody I will eat my hat, that's all!"

Fortunately, Hope was unconscious of there being anything remarkable in the appearance of her eyes at this time; for, had she guessed the alarming nature of their eloquence, she would doubtless have bought herself a pair of blue spectacles at once. It was, indeed, rather bad luck for her that they should already have betrayed her secret to two persons and that each of these persons should have misinterpreted it. Mr. Lefroy, as we have seen, was puzzled, being at a loss to conjecture who was responsible for the change that had come over his niece; but no such uncertainty existed in the mind of Jacob Stiles. Jacob, it is needless to say, had reflected over that little scene in the garden, when Hope had torn up Captain Cunningham's letter, and had drawn his own conclusions, which were at least plausible. It was evident, Jacob thought, that Cunningham had gone too far—had either avowed his love or had hinted at it, and had thereby offended Hope; but it was just as evident that she had subsequently read his letter. Perhaps she had even answered it. The danger of being so clever at induction and deduction as Jacob was is the self-confidence apt to be engendered by that facility, and the proneness which is often noticeable in its possessors to the building up of elaborate theories upon what, after all, is only an assumption. The writings of certain wise men

and philosophers seem to be a little marred by this defect, which, in their case, is known as the scientific habit of mind. Jacob, having formed his theory, had no difficulty in making Hope's behaviour fit in with and support it. Her grief at parting with her husband was easily explained; for of course she wished to do her duty to him, and he was her natural protector, and she dreaded the temptations which could not but derive additional strength from his absence. Nor was there much doubt as to what the sort of quiet, happy melancholy which had since taken possession of her meant. To love and to know herself loved in return must give her happiness of a certain kind, and to be delivered from the presence of a man whom she did not love must also afford her a certain kind of relief.

These conclusions were not the less readily accepted by Jacob because they were distasteful to him personally. He did not consider Cunningham in any way worthy of Hope; he had no affection for that gay youth, and he certainly had once had a strong affection for Dick. The latter feeling was, however, dead and gone—killed (so he told himself) by the utter selfishness of the man. For a long time he had been doubtful whether he loved or hated his benefactor; but he thought that he knew now. Surely he had a right to hate him! Was not hatred the natural result of the careless contempt with which Dick had treated him ever since that unhappy episode of the forged cheque?—a contempt which all these years of steady good conduct had not availed to lessen one whit. And again, does not a selfish man deserve to be hated? Jacob had succeeded in persuading himself that selfishness was the keynote to Dick's character. The

good-nature, the open-handedness that cost him so little—what were they but the selfishness which likes to be surrounded by smiling faces? That habit of saying exactly what he thought to and of his neighbours, which had earned him a name for honesty—what was it but the selfishness which cannot be troubled to consider the feelings of others? And his behaviour to his wife! His open neglect of her; his desertion of her for the sake of gratifying a mere whim; his utter indifference as to what the world would say of such a proceeding! When Jacob thought of these things his face grew dark and he clenched his fists. He had a way of muttering to himself, when alone, and occasionally it happened to him to mutter things which, if they had been heard and repeated, might have justified a magistrate in binding him over to keep the peace.

But, notwithstanding all this mental disturbance, Jacob spent many happy hours at this time—so many that, looking back upon it afterwards, he felt sure that he had never been as happy before and had little chance of ever being as happy again. Every day Hope came up to his studio to watch him at work and receive the instructions which he was only too delighted to bestow upon her; and although the summer was not a particularly fine one (for there had been a fine summer only four years back, and consequently another could not be expected for a long time to come), there were few afternoons so rainy as to prevent this couple from sallying forth together on foot or on horseback to study Nature under all her infinitely varied aspects.

“Jacob,” Hope would say (she had at last given

up calling him Mr. Stiles), "I shall want you to take me up to Ascot Heath this afternoon, so if you have work to do, you must neglect it." And he prepared with joy to neglect his work accordingly.

She treated him as a friend, but nevertheless issued her behests to him very much after the fashion of a gracious sovereign, having, indeed, discovered that he liked nothing so much as being ordered about by her. It was almost exclusively of art that they spoke during their walks and rides. Once or twice Hope had tried to make her companion talk about Dick; but the effect had always been to reduce him to a state of such obstinate taciturnity that she gave it up. Besides, his chief value as a conversationalist lay in his thorough knowledge of his craft and his readiness to impart what he knew. He had the true artist's eye for detail; no effect of light and shade, no peculiarity of outline, escaped him. He showed her a thousand things which she would never have seen, but for him; also he taught her a smattering of anatomy, making her watch the movements of his horse, as he rode beside her, and pointing out to her the power and grace of that most beautiful of animals. What surprised her was that, with all his appreciation of form and colour and all his mastery of the technicalities of his art, he had so little enthusiasm for it and so little ambition for himself. "What should I do with ambition?" he said one day, in answer to a reproach of hers on this score. "It would be a very awkward incumbrance to me, and I am much better without it. A barn-door fowl would look extremely silly if he tried to fly like an eagle, and if a dog who is chained to his kennel all day doesn't want to run loose, he is so far a lucky dog."

"But I don't see the parallel," objected Hope.

However, he did not explain it. "I am glad that I can paint," he resumed presently. "I have gained by painting all that I ever expected or wished to gain—a sort of independence, I mean. Of course it is only a sort of independence; but it is better than none. As for fame, I don't know of any possible good that that could do me."

"Yet it is something, surely, to be distinguished above the common herd."

"To other men it might be; to me there is no satisfaction in being distinguished—if I am distinguished. For years my one ambition was to be able to pay a certain debt. I suppose I may say that I have done that now, as far as the thing can be done; only, unluckily, it can't be done in full." His face grew sombre, and then lightened a little as he looked up at Hope. "I wish I could pay my debt to *you*, Mrs. Herbert!" he exclaimed.

"But you don't owe me anything," said Hope.

"Ah, don't say that! No one has ever been one-hundredth part as good and kind to me as you have been, and there is nothing that I wish for so much as to be able to make some return to you, however small."

"It is by no means a small thing that you are giving up so much of your valuable time to teaching a slow pupil," said Hope.

But Jacob smiled and shook his head. That was not the sort of return that he wanted to make. He would have liked to sacrifice himself in some way for her—to lay the life which he set so little store by at her feet. It was true that he had made one small sacrifice for her sake by remaining at Farndon that

summer, for he had intended to go abroad and visit the great picture-galleries which were known to him only by hearsay; but, upon reflection, he perceived that this plan had been abandoned rather for his own satisfaction than for hers.

"It seems to me, Jacob," said Hope, after a time, "that you ought to be very happy and that you are not happy at all. Why is that?"

"Did you not ask me the same question once before? And I told you that I would answer you some day. Perhaps, if you care to listen to a vulgar, unpleasant story, I will answer you—some day. But, speaking generally, I don't think it is possible to be happy when one is dependent. The one great secret of happiness is to owe no man anything."

Hope mused awhile over this authoritative dictum. Happiness and the means of attaining it are not so easily defined; and it did not appear to her that she had as yet got to the root of the matter, though she had had the advantage of hearing the opinion of various persons upon it. "Have an occupation to fall back upon," said Tristram. "Understand your position clearly," said Dick. "Get hold of money, somehow or other," said Bertie Cunningham. "Make the best of things, and avoid friction," said Mr. Lefroy. And Jacob, it seemed, desired only the negative blessing of having nothing to be grateful for. They all had their theories; so that there was no reason why she should not set up hers, which was that the only thing worth living for is love. And, although this may have a somewhat lackadaisical sound, it is not so absolutely certain that she was mistaken.

CHAPTER X.

A TREATY OF PEACE.

DICK HERBERT was a very well-known man, and as for the Lefroys, their acquaintances were as the sands of the seashore in number. It was scarcely to be supposed, therefore, that Hope's temporary abandonment within so short a time of her marriage should escape remark, or fail to be accounted for in various fashions more or less startling. As a matter of fact, she and her husband and the alleged quarrel that had taken place between them were a good deal discussed that autumn by all who knew them, as well as by many who did not, and the split in the Herbert household formed a welcome alternative subject of conversation to the Egyptian rebellion. As nobody really understood the causes of either event, much nonsense was talked about both, and it is to be feared that our heroine's character met with little more justice or mercy than that of poor Achmet Arabi. Many false things and many silly things were said about her, and Lady Jane was sorely afflicted thereby; but to Hope herself these did not give a moment of uneasiness, for the capital reason that she never heard of them. The neighbours who called upon her from time to time did not know her well enough to report gossip to her or to cross-examine her, though they were always very careful to ask what was the latest news of Mr. Herbert, and what was his real destination, and when he might be expected home again.

Hope could not have done much towards gratifying

their curiosity, even had she been so minded. In due course of time a telegram reached her, announcing Dick's safe arrival at New York; ten days later she received a letter, written apparently in excellent spirits and filled with an account of the incidents of the voyage; shortly after which came a second letter, in which Dick informed her that he was upon the point of starting for the West, that the yacht would return to England immediately, and that he had intrusted to the skipper a small parcel which he hoped would reach her safely. "Only a sample of New York jewellery; some of their work here isn't bad. I saw this thing in a shop-window, and I remembered your saying once that you liked cats'-eyes; so I thought I would buy it for you." The missive was more like that of a brother to his sister than of a husband to his wife; but it satisfied Hope, who read it through a great many times, and who was glad that Dick had remembered her fancy for one stone more than another.

Jacob lingered on; and what with painting, walking, and riding, the days slipped away quickly enough. From the household cares which afford occupation to most women Hope was relieved by the housekeeper, an imposing person with whom she neither dared nor desired to interfere; but in a large establishment there are always plenty of interests, and Hope had endeared herself to the people about the place. Gardeners, lodgekeepers, and so forth, welcomed her approach, as did also their numerous progeny, for whom she was in the habit of purchasing a supply of toys and sugar-plums every time that she drove into Windsor. She liked to potter about with these somewhat dull-witted folks, to listen to the exhaustive descriptions that they

were wont to give her of their ailments, and to make the older ones among them repeat over and over again certain anecdotes about "Master Dick" and the owda-cious deeds of his boyhood.

When Roberts, the captain of the yacht, wrote to report his arrival at Portsmouth and his intention of forwarding by post the parcel committed to his care, she sent him a long telegram, begging him to run no such risk, but to come to Farndon himself and deliver the packet into her own hands. The good-humoured-looking, rosy-cheeked skipper, who may have had a sailor's eye for female loveliness, stared hard at his new mistress, and expressed a hope that they would have her on board when they made their next cruise. Sea-sickness, he assured her, was nothing when you were used to it; both Mr. Herbert and the other gentleman had been a bit queer the first day out, and had been all the better for it. Then Hope showed him the cat's-eye pendant, with its glittering circle of diamonds, and he observed that it must have cost a power of money. "The governor was terrible particular about it, to be sure!" he added. "Says he, 'If the yacht goes to the bottom and you have to take to your boats, you must save that, whatever you leave behind you. I won't have Mrs. Herbert disappointed,' he says."

It seems possible that Roberts may have been drawing a little upon his imagination here; but it was worth while telling a white lie to see Hope's face break out into smiles and dimples. He and she became great friends; only he was unable to give her the information which she had secretly hoped for. Mr. Herbert, it appeared, had said nothing about the date

of his return; but the yacht was to be laid up, and Roberts had heard the other gentleman express a decided preference for mail steamers as a means of transit across the ocean. "And there's no denying but they'll get home all the sooner that way, do you see, ma'am. Which is what the governor 'll wish, I make no doubt."

This was the sort of tone which all Hope's dependents thought fit to adopt. Whatever their private opinion may have been, they always spoke as if it must be a matter of course that their master was eager to return to his home and his wife, and when she assured them that she did not expect to see him again for nearly a year, they were ready with the incredulous shake of the head which her remark invited.

"Things isn't as they was in the old days, when he'd be away for eighteen months or more at a time," these optimists would say. "It was kind of lonesome for him then, with only Miss Carry to keep him company, and she staying with her friends as often as not; but 'tis a very different matter now."

Perhaps it was rather absurd to be pleased and consoled by such speeches as these; but Hope managed to persuade herself that there was a grain of truth in them, and she missed them greatly when at length she had to pay her promised visit to Helston and encounter the jeremiads of Lady Jane, who took a desponding view of the situation which she was at no pains to conceal from her niece.

"It does seem to me that you have mismanaged matters, Hope," she said fretfully. "You ought never to have let Dick resume these wandering ways. Now that he has broken loose once he is sure to do it

again; and it is such a mistake for husbands and wives to begin that kind of thing!"

"Dick is not the only married man who goes on shooting expeditions to America," observed Hope.

"Oh, my dear, of course there are people who can do these things and others who can't. I don't wish to go back upon the past; but I should have thought you would have seen for yourself that this was a particularly inopportune time for you and Dick to part. However, there is not much good in talking about it, now that the thing is done and can't be undone."

This was indisputable; but Lady Jane continued to talk about it, notwithstanding; and Lady Jane's guests showed less tact in their allusions to Hope's bereavement than her humbler friends at Farndon had done. The men were inclined to treat it as a joke and to chaff her after a mild, tentative fashion, and one very rude old gentleman went so far as to say, "So your husband is off to the wilds again, I hear, Mrs. Herbert. What is the attraction? Does he keep a detachment of squaws out there, do you think? I should not mind the squaws, if I were you, since they are such a long way off; but I should draw the line at papposes. Don't let him bring any untutored papposes back with him."

But of course it was at the hands of the women that she suffered the most. Some of them expressed great surprise at the length of tether which she allowed to her husband, declaring that *they* would never have been so accommodating; others treated her to a liberal measure of ironical pity; most of them had an air of looking askance at her and wondering whether it was all right. She perceived that in some undefined

manner she had lost caste. People who had been very civil and respectful to her during the season were disposed to be familiar, not to say impertinent, now; and there is often great difficulty in snubbing impertinent people without descending to their level. Hope could not help thinking sometimes that Dick might have foreseen this as one of the inevitable consequences of her unprotected condition; also her spirits were a little damped by the certainty which everybody appeared to feel that her husband would never care to settle down to a domestic life. After all, these people probably knew him better than his retainers at Farn-don could. Thus it came to pass that her pillow was not unfrequently wet with tears. She had postponed her visit to her relations until the year was far advanced; and now, with mistaken kindness, they insisted upon her remaining with them over Christmas. And a very cheerless Christmas she spent in the old home, where everything was so changed. Dick's letters had lately become very irregular; in his last he had warned her that it might be a long time before he would have an opportunity of letting her hear from him again; some amiable persons were so good as to entertain her with accounts of snowstorms in the far West, and of hunting parties which had perished miserably in those wind swept solitudes. Altogether it was a dismal time, and it seemed to her as if it would never come to an end. But it came to an end at last, as all earthly things do, both for the patient and the impatient; and early in January, Hope was permitted to return to Farndon, where she found Carry, who had arrived from the north a few days before.

Carry had been paying a visit of inspection to her Yorkshire domain, and had had a bad attack of the blues there, she said. Mrs. Pierpoint had been staying with her, but had now gone on to Leicestershire, and when others had been invited to take her place they had all with one consent begun to make excuse. "So I thought I would come here and cheer you up," Carry concluded, leaving it to be inferred that this charitable course had only been resorted to as a *pis-aller*.

Hope thanked her, and endeavoured to look grateful. But it was not very long before she discovered that the boon of her sister-in-law's society had not been conferred upon her wholly and solely from the motive assigned.

"Did you hear about poor Captain Cunningham?" Carry asked, in the course of the evening.

"I heard that he had been ordered to Egypt," answered Hope; "I didn't hear of his having earned any honourable scars there."

"He never had the chance. The Guards were shamefully treated, and he says he can't imagine why they were sent there, when any ordinary line-regiment might have done the work that was given to them. All he gained by the campaign was an attack of fever; so that he has been obliged to go home to be nursed. I suppose," added Carry, after waiting in vain for any expression of sympathy from Hope, "you wouldn't object to my asking him to come down here for a few days, would you? He does so hate being at home with that disagreeable old father of his, and I think a little change might do him good."

"I should object most decidedly," answered Hope,

quickly. She was taken by surprise, or she would hardly have made so ungracious and peremptory a reply.

"What do you mean?" asked Carry, her eyes growing large and angry and her voice hard. "Is it to Captain Cunningham individually that you object, or to my inviting any friend of mine to come and see me?"

Hope saw what a stupid blunder she had made, and tried to retrieve it. "Of course any friend of yours would be welcome here," she said; "but I would rather you didn't ask Captain Cunningham just now. It is best not to have—bachelors staying in the house while we are alone. Dick told me before he went away that he did not wish it."

"Told you that he didn't wish you to have bachelors in the house!" echoed Carry incredulously. "Do you seriously expect me to believe that Dick ever gave you such instructions as that?"

Now Dick's instructions had certainly been less general; but it was impossible to give them *verbatim*, so Hope contented herself with repeating, "I would rather you did not ask Captain Cunningham just now."

"Why not? I really should very much like to know why not! Do you imagine that Captain Cunningham's presence will compromise you? That does seem to be rather a needless alarm. I am sure that his admiration for you knows no bounds; but, at the same time, I hardly think—if you will pardon my saying so—that he is enamoured of you. And if you come to talk of bachelors and the danger of associating with them, what do you make of your dear friend Jacob Stiles?"

"Jacob Stiles is different. Besides, he is not in the house," said Hope, rather feebly.

"No; but he was in the house for a long time after I left you, and I hear that you and he were inseparable. There is no accounting for tastes, and I am sure I should be the last person in the world to interfere with yours; but surely you might have hit upon some better excuse for preventing me from gratifying mine."

Hope inwardly admitted the justice of the criticism and endeavoured to profit by it. "Don't you see," she urged, "that I am not the only person who might be compromised by Captain Cunningham's visit?"

"Oh! So this tender solicitude is on my account, is it? I am deeply grateful; but, do you know, I think I will take my chance of being compromised."

"Probably you don't quite mean that. You would not like him to think—or people to say—that you were running after him."

But this appeal to Carry's pride was not a success. "How kind you are!" she exclaimed, "and how thoughtful! If you had not suggested it, I should never have suspected that any one could charge me with running after Captain Cunningham. How could I anticipate an accusation so utterly at variance with the facts? I have never asked him to Farndon before, have I? I didn't monopolise him for days when he was here; I didn't follow him to Dublin, as soon as he was sent there; and I don't keep up a constant correspondence with him now. Of course not!—and nothing short of a disinterested warning could have put me on my guard. The only thing that surprises

me is that you shouldn't have favoured me with your warning a little sooner."

Hope hardly knew what answer to make to this sudden outburst of bitterness, which seemed to be prompted quite as much by self-contempt as by anger. She could not pretend to be unaware that Captain Cunningham had been openly and persistently run after for more than a year, and she feared that Carry must have some inkling of the truth. That this was not so Carry's next words plainly showed.

"The fact is," she resumed, dropping sarcasm and speaking with measured calmness, "that you have always disliked me, and that you are only too glad to have a pretext for causing me discomfort and inconvenience. I don't in the least wonder at your disliking me; all things considered, I should wonder much more if you didn't; but you may as well give up any idea that you can prevent me from doing what I choose. I admit that I can't ask Captain Cunningham here against your wish; only there is no reason why I shouldn't meet him elsewhere. All that I shall do will be to go up to London, where he is sure to be before long. You and he and the rest of the world will draw your own conclusions, no doubt; but probably all of you drew them some time ago."

There was a cynical frankness in this speech which touched Hope, though it shocked her a little. She could not herself have spoken or acted in that way; but she could understand how a passionate, self-willed woman might be goaded into doing so, and she had reasons of her own for sympathising with the pangs of unrequited love.

"You are wrong in thinking that I wished to spite

you, Carry," she said gently; "I should be very glad to help you if I could. I am afraid I must stick to what I said about not having Captain Cunningham here—it is a whim of mine, if you like—but if my going up to London with you would make things any easier, I would do that. We might go to Bruton Street together, and then you would have opportunities of seeing him without—without letting him think that you came up for that purpose."

Carry smiled. "I imagine," said she, "that he has sufficient mother-wit to discover that much, whether I go to London alone or with a companion; but it would certainly be far pleasanter for me to go to Bruton Street than to an hotel, and I accept your offer gladly." She got up and took her sister-in-law's hand, looking full into her eyes as she did so. "Shall we make a treaty of peace?" she said. "We are too unlike one another to become friends; but I think you mean kindly towards me, and I am not ungrateful. You are a good woman, and Dick is a fool. But that can't be helped."

Hope allowed the latter assertion to pass. "I do mean kindly towards you," she replied, "and I would have been friends with you before now if you had allowed me. I will do the little that I can to bring about what you wish. But—is he worth it, Carry?"

"Most likely not," answered Carry; "but that can't be helped either."

Hope bent over the fire, holding up her hands to the blaze. It was no easy matter to say what she wanted to say; but after a while she made the attempt. "In one sense," she remarked, "people are always worth what one thinks them worth; but then, if one's

idea of them changes when it is too late? If one finds out——”

“That one has been married for one’s money?” interrupted Carry. “That discovery would not come upon me with the shock of a surprise. You look horrified; but that is because your feelings are not so strong as mine, or because they are more under control, or better regulated, or something. I can’t say that your horror distresses me particularly.”

She crossed the room, sat down to the piano, and played a few bars of a waltz; but presently she returned and said, in an altered voice, “I am sorry I was rude to you; I won’t do it again, if I can help it; but you must not waste any more breath in trying to make me ashamed of myself. Good Heavens! do you suppose I don’t know how despicable I am? If my case had been curable, it would have been cured long ago, when I first saw that he didn’t care for me. At one time I thought he did. There!” she added, with another change of tone, “that will do. I am not going to be sentimental. Come up to London with me, like a good soul as you are, and let us make an end of this. There shall be an end of it now, one way or the other; it has gone on too long—too long!”

The last words were spoken with an accent of pain which went to Hope’s heart. She was not, and indeed could hardly be, very fond of her sister-in-law; but she thought her worthy of a better fate than that of being sacrificed to pay Bertie Cunningham’s debts, and she doubted whether even such a measure of happiness as Carry seemed to anticipate would be secured to her by the proposed journey to London. She did not give Bertie credit for much constancy; but he was not

devoid of refinement, and surely it would be very difficult for him to make his long-deferred offer of marriage to Carry barely six months after his declaration of unalterable love for herself. Still, there appeared to be nothing for it but to move to Bruton Street; and to Bruton Street the household was accordingly transported in the course of a few days.

By a tacit mutual understanding, the two ladies said no more to each other about the cause of their change of quarters. To the visitors who called upon them as soon as their arrival in town became known they represented that they had found it dull in the country, and that they wanted to do some shopping and go to the theatres. It was a week before the visitor to whose coming one of them had been looking forward with eagerness and the other with a good deal of trepidation made his appearance; and Hope was thankful that the short winter afternoon was drawing to a close when he was announced, so that nobody's features were clearly discernible in that half-light.

CHAPTER XI.

TRISTRAM POINTS A MORAL.

BERTIE advanced into the room rather slowly. Most likely he, as well as Hope, was glad of the semi-obscurity which only enabled him to see two shadowy female figures and rendered his own as shadowy to them. His nerves, however, were a good deal steadier than Hope's. He had at all times a tolerable command over his voice and countenance, and there was

little fear of his betraying embarrassment in a situation which most men would have found cruelly embarrassing. He did not like it; but he had always known that it would have to be faced one day or another, and his great fear now was lest Hope, by refusing to take his hand, or by some such deplorable error in judgment, should make her displeasure manifest to those whom it did not concern.

But Hope was not quite so foolish as that, unwilling though she was to do anything which could lead the young man to suppose that his offence was condoned. She rose as he drew nearer, and the greeting which she had been looking forward to with apprehension ever since her arrival in London was over in an instant. Bertie did exactly what he ought to have done. He just touched Hope's fingers with his, saying, "How do you do, Mrs. Herbert?" and at once turned to Carry, by whom he was welcomed with considerably greater warmth.

"So here you are back again, safe and sound!" she cried. "I am heartily glad of it, and now I hope there will be no more Egyptian campaigns."

"So do I," returned Bertie, as he dropped into a chair. "At least, if there are any more, I trust we shan't be told off to take part in them as beasts of burden. If they didn't mean us to have a look in at the fun, they might as well have spared us an unpleasant voyage and saved me from a pretty smart attack of typhoid."

"But you are nearly well again now, are you not?" asked Carry.

"Oh yes, I'm by way of being convalescent. I can't say I feel up to much; but of course I shall be

all right. I'm like a shabby old umbrella, you know —no getting rid of me on any terms. If my life had been of the smallest value to myself or anybody else, no doubt I should have died."

"I suppose you say that because you want to be contradicted," observed Carry.

"Exactly so; please contradict me. The Jews have been kind enough to do that already. They seem to think I may be worth something to them—which shows a fine, healthy faith on their part."

He went on talking in this way, addressing all his remarks to Carry, and only showing that he was not quite comfortable by a somewhat exaggerated loquacity. By and by, when the servants brought in the tea and the shaded lamps, Hope saw that he had grown pale and thin; also he seemed to have aged a little, the boyish roundness of his cheeks having disappeared. But he had not lost his good looks, nor, as far as could be judged, had his spirits suffered. Hope was obliged to speak to him once or twice while she was pouring out his tea, and was glad to find that she could do so with composure. He answered her politely, but briefly, not raising his eyes to hers, and Carry continued to ply him with questions about the war and about his illness. The presence of a third person was obviously neither required nor desired, and the third person was casting about her for some excuse to withdraw, when the door was thrown open and Mr. Tristram was announced.

The interruption was a welcome one to Hope in every way. She started up to meet her old master, who came striding towards her, pushing the chairs out of his way and upsetting one of them on his passage.

"Why on earth do people block up their rooms with such a lot of useless furniture?" he exclaimed.

He made a rapid, ungainly bow to Miss Herbert, to whom Hope introduced him, and when Bertie, with bland affability, recalled himself to the recollection of the famous artist, frowned and said, not over-courteously, "Oh!—Captain Cunningham, isn't it? I thought you were on foreign service."

Tristram had not had the advantage of living in so excellent a school for self-repression as the society to which Bertie was accustomed; nor, perhaps, would he have proved a very apt pupil if he had. When anything worried him or put him out, the fact was at once made patent to all who came within sight or hearing of him, and he was evidently put out now. He would not sit down when he was asked, but fidgeted about between the fireplace and the window, replying at random to Hope's observations and every now and then throwing half-impatient, half-appealing glances at her, the purport of which she was quite at a loss to understand. At the end of ten minutes or so he grabbed his hat, remarking, with a sigh, "I must be off now. Perhaps I may have the luck to find you alone some other day."

This speech, which was made without any lowering of the voice, greatly amused Miss Herbert, who rather liked eccentric people. "What is to be done?" she asked laughing. "Shall I lead Captain Cunningham into the back drawing-room and shut the door?"

"No," answered Hope, laughing too; "Mr. Tristram shall come down with me to my sanctum and look over my sketches. I want him to tell me whether he can detect any faint signs of improvement."

Tristram grunted approval at this suggestion, bade a curt adieu to Miss Herbert and Captain Cunningham, and followed his hostess out of the room.

"How could you be so rude?" exclaimed Hope, as she preceded him downstairs.

"Was I rude?" asked Tristram innocently. "I only said I wanted to see you alone; there was no harm in that, surely! Those people can't have supposed that I came here to see them."

"Well," said Hope, showing him into the little room on the ground-floor which was affected to her special use, and closing the door behind her, "now that we are alone, what is the matter? You look as if you were longing to fight with somebody."

"Do I?" said Tristram; "that is not how I feel. I suppose the sight of Captain Cunningham must have exasperated me; men of his type always do exasperate me." He tossed his hat into a corner, threw back his long hair, and began to pace to and fro. "I thought I should like to have a talk with you," he said; "I had something to tell you. It may not interest you; it is only a story about myself, and a sufficiently melancholy one; but I shall be glad if you will listen to it. You know—or, on second thoughts, perhaps you don't know—the kind of fellow that I am. I am bound to relate my troubles to somebody; and all my old friends are dead and gone now."

"I am sure you know that I am interested in everything that concerns you," said Hope.

"Yes? Well, you are kind to say so. Did your father ever tell you anything about my history?"

"He told me that you had had a great misfortune

once," answered Hope, hesitatingly; "I don't think he knew much about it."

"Oh, he knew. Everybody—at all events, everybody in the artistic world—knew about it at the time; but it happened many years ago, and I daresay there are only a few people now who still remember the beautiful Mrs. Tristram, as she used to be called. I was very proud of her. I used to take her to all the balls and parties that I could get invitations for; though it was as much as I could do to pay for the hire of a brougham in those days, and I wouldn't for the world have asked her to get into a dirty four-wheeled cab. Ours was a love-match—an imprudent one, as I need hardly say. Her people were strongly opposed to it; but we took our own way in spite of them, and were very happy together for nearly three years. I ought rather to say that I was happy; for she was not, though I never suspected her of being anything else. The catastrophe that came to pass in Paris was simply astounding to me; it was as if my dearest friend had suddenly turned upon me and stabbed me to the heart without any warning or provocation.

"I don't want to go into details; the less said about it the better. I was working very hard at that time and I wanted to learn something from the French, who were our superiors then, as they are still. So we migrated across the Channel for a few months, and the Parisians received us very hospitably. Of course we got to know a great number of artists, young and old; amongst others, a certain Achille de Thiancourt, a young sprig of nobility with a waxed moustache and a pink-and-white face, who came and went. I never noticed him particularly; certainly it did not

occur to me to draw comparisons between him and myself. A year or two ago, while I was strolling through the *Salon*, somebody pointed out to me a little shrivelled, bald-headed old man, with a bit of red ribbon in his buttonhole—"M. le Baron de Thiancourt, one of the most distinguished ornaments of our profession"—and asked me whether I would care to be presented; but I said that was unnecessary. He walked with a limp, I noticed—the effect of the bullet with which I smashed his knee-cap five-and-twenty years ago. I might have killed him if I had cared to take his life, for I was a fair shot with a pistol in my young days; but I was satisfied with disabling him. It was impossible to feel much anger against the poor little wretch; if it had not been he, it would have been another. She as good as told me so in the note which I found on my table one evening, on my return from the country, and which informed me that she had left me and had placed herself under his protection. She was tired of being treated as a nonentity, she said."

Tristram paused for a few moments, knitting his brows and staring straight before him. "Well," he resumed presently, "that's the story: it isn't a very edifying one. The sequel to it came only the other day, when a message reached me from a doctor whom I know, telling me that my wife was dying and was very anxious to see me. I found her in lodgings scarcely a stone's throw from my own house; she had been living there for several years, it appeared, but had seldom left the house, being in constant suffering from the lingering disease which killed her at last. Poor soul! she had had a hard life; and if sins can be atoned for by earthly pain (which orthodox folks say

is not the case) hers must have been expiated long ago. I haven't the heart to repeat all that she said to me about herself. She lived for a time with De Thiancourt and was miserable, of course, as all women must be in such a position. Then he began to treat her badly, and one day he struck her, and she left him. She found herself thrown upon the world— young, beautiful, with no friends, no money, and no reputation—her fate was a foregone conclusion. She wanted me to say that I forgave her, and I believe she died more easily after I had assured her that I could say that from my heart. But what has haunted me ever since is the reason that she gave for her desertion of me. It seemed so paltry, so trivial, so almost laughable. And yet the more I think of it the more I see that it was a reason like another. She did not reproach me with any unkindness; but she said I had changed towards her, that I had ceased to pay her the small attentions to which she was accustomed, that I never noticed whether she was well or ill dressed, that I was always pre-occupied and often did not hear her when she spoke to me. It was quite true. I had my art to think about; I hadn't the time to be for ever *aux petits soins* with my wife; but I loved her no less than I had done from the first—indeed, I may honestly say that I have never loved any other woman in my life. Very likely I was to blame; I don't say that I was not. Women, I suppose, attach a great deal more importance to trifles than we do, and I can understand what she meant by saying that she could have pardoned me more easily if I had been guilty of cruelty towards her. Yet what a mistake she made!—what a terrible mistake! She saw it, and repented bitterly of it, as soon

as it was made; but mistakes of that kind are irreparable; there is no cure for them but death."

"What a dreadfully sad story!" murmured Hope, after he had remained silent for a time.

"Sad enough," agreed Tristram, "and common enough too, for that matter. There's nothing specially tragic or romantic about it, you see; nothing to bring tears into anybody's eyes; it's only the commonplace, vulgar narrative of a woman who left her husband in a fit of pique, and of the ruin that she brought upon herself by her folly. But I don't know that it is any the less sad on that account. Why have I told it to you, do you think?"

Hope looked uneasily at him. "You said that it was a relief to you to speak of your troubles," she answered.

"Ah, my dear child, if I had wanted your sympathy only, wouldn't it have been simpler to say, 'My wife, who separated herself from me years ago, is just dead, and I am miserable, because I find that the misfortune which has made me a sour, solitary man ever since was partly my own fault after all, and that I might have kept her with me if I had been a little more considerate to her?' No; I had another reason. All this has made me think a good deal about marriage and married people, and to some extent it has altered my opinion. I am afraid I gave you bad advice once, when you came to consult me. Do you remember consulting me?"

"Quite well," answered Hope, with an uncomfortable prescience of what he was going to say next; "but I don't think you advised me badly."

"I gave you advice in accordance with my own

experience. I suppose that is what everybody does; and it shows what a useless thing advice is. Nevertheless, I am going to do much the same again. That is, I should like you to think over what my poor wife's experience has been. Let it be admitted that husbands are apt to be neglectful and selfish with regard to minor matters. I daresay most of them are, and I daresay they oughtn't to be. But is it wise to quarrel with them for that? Is it wise to assume that small attentions, however pleasant they may be at the time, are any test of real affection? De Thiancourt's attentions didn't last long; and there was no true love at the back of them either."

"I am not sure that I quite understand you," said Hope, with a slightly heightened colour.

"I think you must understand. I won't ask whether you have quarrelled with your husband; but I know that he has gone off to America, without fixing any time for his return, and I know that you are here in London receiving visits from—from all sorts of people. As an old friend, I will take the liberty of saying to you that that is a dangerous state of affairs."

"I must confess," answered Hope, "that I should have considered that a very great liberty for any one but an old friend to take. And I cannot allow even you to compare me—to suppose that——"

"That you resemble poor Stella! God forbid! Still, your cause for complaint is possibly something like hers. I am unhappy about you, and I had it on my mind to speak out, whether I offended you or not. Perhaps I was foolish and presumptuous in taking upon me to recommend you to marry Mr. Herbert; but what is done is done, and I can't but think that you may

be very happy with him yet. Don't let a mere misunderstanding part you. He may be in the wrong; but you are not in the right. I know something of the man, and he is neither selfish nor a fool; though it sometimes suits him to behave as if he were both. He hasn't gone away now because he is weary of you or because he has a hankering after wild sport. I don't agree with Stiles as to that."

"Stiles? Has Jacob Stiles been talking to you about my affairs?" asked Hope, drawing herself up.

"Well, yes; since you ask me, he has. But you mustn't be angry with the poor lad; Heaven knows he is respectful and admiring enough in his language about you! I have seen a good deal of him lately, and we have talked together. Maybe I put questions to him which he couldn't help answering. Well, I have said my say now, and said it without much delicacy. I am an ill-mannered sort of ruffian, as you know, and it is difficult to me to wrap up my meaning in the round-about phrases that ladies like; but at least I am a true friend. You believe that, don't you?"

Hope nodded. "But I should be glad if my friends could trust me a little," she said. "You are not the only one who has thought fit to caution me in this way. I can't pretend to think it pleasant or flattering; but I suppose it is unavoidable. I wish—" she paused for a moment and then, with a break in her voice, exclaimed—"I wish Dick were back again!"

Tristram's face brightened. "I am rejoiced to hear you say that," he declared. "Will you forgive me for having been so outspoken with you?"

"Oh, I forgive you," Hope answered, though there was still some resentment in her heart, and she gave

him her hand, which he took, saying that he had outstayed his time and should be late for an appointment.

It would have been easy for her to set his mind at rest by telling him that she loved her husband, and that Bertie Cunningham was probably upon the eve of becoming engaged to Miss Herbert; but she did not at the moment feel disposed towards making confidences, nor did she think that he quite deserved to receive any.

He bade her good-bye, begging her to pay a visit to the old studio when she had nothing better to do, and so marched towards the door. But upon the threshold he paused and turned back. "I want you to tell me something about Stiles," he said. "That is a queer fellow—a very queer fellow. He interests me because he is a great artist and will be a greater one, if he lives; but I am not certain that I like him. Has he any grudge against your husband, do you know?"

"He owes everthing to Dick," answered Hope. "I don't know whether that constitutes a grudge."

"H'm!—it might, perhaps; though I fancy there must be something more. Do you know anything about the antecedents of Stiles? Do you know who his parents were?"

Hope shook her head. "I have never liked to ask. I think he is rather sensitive upon the subject."

"Yes—a badly-bred one, no doubt," observed Tristram musingly. "He often reminds me of a little cur-dog that I once had and hated; though I suppose the poor little brute couldn't help its disposition. He has a furtive 'I-would-if-I-dared' sort of look at times which is anything but prepossessing."

"Poor Jacob!" said Hope; "I am afraid I don't

much like him either; but he has been very kind to me, and I am sure there is a great deal of good in him."

"And a pretty considerable spice of evil. Possibly an out-and-out scoundrel might be a safer customer to deal with. Still, in all probability, he never *will* dare."

"To do what?"

"To assassinate your enemies," answered Tristram, laughing. "He would, though, if you asked him. Now I must really be off. Good-bye again, and don't forget to come and see an old man who has very few friends left in the world."

CHAPTER XII.

HOPE IS TAKEN TO THE PLAY.

OF Hope's two visitors that afternoon, Tristram, it appeared, was not the only one who had an appointment elsewhere; for no sooner had that gentleman been conducted downstairs, as above related, than Bertie pulled out his watch, exclaiming: "By Jove! I had no idea it was so late. I promised to call upon some people at five o'clock."

"You are in a great hurry," said Carry. "Can't you keep your friends waiting a few minutes longer? You haven't told me anything about yourself yet."

"There's nothing to tell," replied Bertie; "I'm like Mrs. Micawber, I am *in statu quo*."

"Why wouldn't you let me help you?"

"I told you why at the time. It was awfully good of you; but the thing was utterly out of the question.

You know very well that you would never have accepted such an offer yourself."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Carry, after a short interval of silence.

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is more than I can tell you. The Egyptians couldn't put a bullet into me, and the typhoid fever didn't manage to kill me; so I suppose I must be reserved for some pleasing fate or other."

"At least," pleaded Carry, "you won't do anything rash without consulting me, will you?"

"Oh no," he answered, with a sort of laugh, "I won't do anything rash without consulting you. It is extremely unlikely that I shall do anything rash either before or after consultation. It strikes me that rashness is not one of my failings."

Then he picked up his hat and stick and went away.

He had not thought it advisable to mention that he was going to call upon a friend of Miss Herbert's, who had only just arrived in London; because, in the first place, it seemed doubtful whether Carry would have accepted that as a sufficient excuse for his departure, and in the second she would have been quite capable of putting on her bonnet and accompanying him. It would have been annoying if she had done that, for he was anxious to talk to Mrs. Pierpoint alone.

Just as he was about to ring the door-bell of the house in Green Street, a very small and emaciated man came blundering out, lurched against him, begged his pardon, and went away down the street with hurried, devious gait, like a little black spider.

"So *you're* here, are you, you drunken little beast?"

muttered Bertie. "I wonder she doesn't have you locked up; *I* would."

A few minutes later he was shaking hands with Mrs. Pierpoint, whom he had not seen since his return from Egypt, and whose reception of him seemed to lack the warmth that might have been expected after so long a separation. When Bertie had said all that he had to say about his uneventful campaign, he came to the point by remarking: "Miss Herbert is in London. Did you know it?"

"No," answered Mrs. Pierpoint, "I didn't know it. Is that why you are in London?"

"Yes; and I wish you wouldn't put on that stern expression. I am going to be good; only it isn't easy, and I want your support and sympathy."

"I'll endeavour to prop you up," said Mrs. Pierpoint; "I can't honestly say that I sympathise with you much."

"I think you ought, considering all that I have told you at different times; but I never met any one quite so hard-hearted as you are. I saw *her* this afternoon," added Bertie, with a deep sigh.

"Do you mean that you saw Carry?"

"You know I don't. I did see her, too; but—oh, confound it all! don't you understand what an awful corner I'm in? How can I propose to the woman whom I mean to marry under the very nose of the woman whom I love—and who knows that I love her?"

"What is that you say?" asked Mrs. Pierpoint sharply.

Bertie looked a little confused. "Of course she knows it," he said, "how can she help knowing it? I tell you I am going to do the right thing; but I don't wish her to despise me utterly."

"I am afraid you can't have it all your own way; and you ought not to mind being despised for doing what is right. What was your object in coming to me, if I may ask?"

"I wish I hadn't come!" exclaimed Bertie pettishly; "you always scold me, whether I do right or wrong. *Is it right to make a marriage of this kind?* There! Answer that question, if you can."

"I thought I had answered it, to the best of my powers, long ago. I really have nothing fresh to say about the matter."

There was a pause of a few seconds, after which Bertie remarked casually: "I met Pierpoint at the door just now."

Mrs. Pierpoint looked at him steadily. The innuendo was not lost upon her; but neither Bertie nor any one else had ever heard her breathe a word against her disreputable consort. "Yes," she said quietly; "I came up to town to meet him. He is going to Monte Carlo for the winter, as usual."

"Shall I be allowed to go abroad for the winter after I am married, do you think?" asked Bertie, with a slight laugh. "I shall be all in the fashion if I do. I suppose you know that Herbert is away in Texas or Colorado or some such place."

Mrs. Pierpoint made no immediate rejoinder. "Perhaps," she said at length, "it would save time if you would tell me plainly what it is that you want me to do?"

"Oh, if you put it in that way, nothing. One naturally turns to one's friends at a pinch, that is all. If I wanted anything, I wanted you to see me through;

but as you evidently can't or won't, I shall have to pull through as best I can by myself."

"Ah, you are not quite frank," said Mrs. Pierpoint; "I suspect that you want a little more than that. I suspect that you would like me to make excuses for you to Mrs. Herbert, to represent to her that you are inconsolable; but that, since you can't marry her, you find yourself bound in honour to marry somebody else. In fact, you wish me to point out that, taking everything into consideration, you are acting in a very noble and disinterested way. Well, I am sorry; but I must decline the commission."

"I never wanted you to do any such thing," cried Bertie warmly—and, to give him his due, he was not conscious of having entertained the desire attributed to him. "It is all very well to accuse me of not being frank; but you snub me so that I hardly know what I am saying. I must confess that when I asked you to let me call to-day, I expected that you would be a little more friendly. I expected you to offer me a helping hand."

"In what way?"

"Well, I thought perhaps you would call in Bruton Street and—and—back me up generally."

"Oh," said Mrs. Pierpoint, "if that is all, I am quite at your service. How am I to begin? Shall I ask the three of you to dinner?"

"I wish you would!" exclaimed Bertie. "Unsympathetic as you are, I should think even you must understand how miserable it is for me to go to that house just now."

"You seemed to be able to face the misery of it

for a considerable time down at Farndon," observed Mrs. Pierpoint.

"Ah, but there was always somebody to make a fourth at Farndon."

"I see. Nevertheless, you are not quite frank. But you shall be asked to dinner, all the same. How would it do to make a theatre evening of it? I am going to the play on Wednesday with Marmaduke" (it was by this high-sounding name that Mr. Pierpoint's parents had christened their deplorable little progeny), "and if you think Mrs. Herbert would care to join us, I will write and suggest it to her."

Bertie jumped at this proposal. "That will do first-rate," he declared. "And now I hope to goodness you are not going to be cross with me any more."

But Mrs. Pierpoint shook her head. "I am not pleased with you," she returned, "and I don't care to pretend that I am."

"Why are you displeased? What possible reason can you have for being displeased with me now?"

"I will answer you, if you like," said Mrs. Pierpoint tranquilly; "but perhaps you had better not press the question."

And, upon reflection, Bertie thought that perhaps he wouldn't press the question. He had a high opinion of Mrs. Pierpoint's sagacity; it was quite possible that she suspected him of having revealed the state of his feelings to Hope, and he knew very well that, if she charged him in so many words with having done so, her suspicions would speedily be converted into certainty. So he let the subject drop and went away, saying that he would see about getting the theatre tickets.

The invitation was despatched without delay, and was at once accepted. Hope was sincerely rejoiced to hear that Mrs. Pierpoint was in London, for she was scarcely less anxious than Bertie himself to secure the company of a fourth person; and when the appointed evening came, she was a good deal surprised and chilled by the somewhat formal welcome which the little lady extended to her. Was it possible that Mrs. Pierpoint, too, was disposed to look askance at her because her husband was in America? That would really be a little too bad, considering how very seldom Mrs. Pierpoint's own husband was to be seen with her.

While these thoughts were passing through Hope's mind, Mrs. Pierpoint's husband made one of his rare appearances—a little, grizzle-headed, woebegone-looking man, with a drooping moustache. He was said, by the few friends who still stuck to him, to have been a good fellow once upon a time, a bold rider and a fine shot. In these days he had no occupations and no tastes left, except a moderate one for gambling and an immoderate one for stimulant. When in London, he spent nearly the whole of his days at his club, where it was his habit to fall asleep in the reading-room and snore loudly, to the great indignation of the other members. Indeed, the attention of the committee had more than once been drawn to this objectionable conduct on the part of Mr. Pierpoint; but as his conduct in other respects was more objectionable still, and as he had not yet been requested to remove his name from the books, it was, perhaps, hyper-criticism to complain of a few grunts from one so closely resembling the animal from whom grunts are proverbially to be expected. Besides, there was a general feeling that

some allowance ought to be made for poor Pierpoint, "because he has such a rough time of it at home, you know."

He advanced into the drawing-room with uncertain steps. His steps were always uncertain, his shrunken body seeming to lack the ballast requisite for a straight course, even in his soberest moments. At the present moment he was perfectly sober. His wife having informed him that some people were coming to dinner, he had heroically abstained from strong drink ever since the middle of the day, and was consequently in a condition of the deepest despondency. After he had been introduced to Hope he stationed himself beside her, with his head sunk upon his breast and both hands behind his back, and did not even attempt to make conversation. To everything that she said he replied by a prolonged, barely articulate assent—"Oh yes! Yes—yes—yes—yes"—staring straight before him the while with dull, vacant eyes. It was only when dinner was announced that he roused himself from his melancholy lethargy, and said almost briskly, as he offered Hope his arm: "That's a good job! Now we shall get something to drink—eat, I mean."

Hope, who had never before encountered any one afflicted with Mr. Pierpoint's complaint, concluded at first that the poor man must be suffering from incipient softening of the brain, but before dinner was half over, even she could not help perceiving what was really the matter. Nothing could have been more artistically excellent than that repast, or prettier than the floral decoration of the oval table upon which it was served; but it is extremely improbable that anybody, except the master of the house, enjoyed it. The remaining

four diners were each and all preoccupied by anxious thoughts of their own. Mrs. Pierpoint was evidently out of spirits; Bertie was uneasily loquacious; Carry, who understood quite well with what object the party had been arranged, was provoked with herself and her friends, and showed that she was so; while Hope, between dawning suspicion of her tipsy little neighbour and dread lest her determination to avoid speaking to or looking at Bertie Cunningham should be noticed, was thoroughly uncomfortable.

Nor did the demeanour of Mr. Pierpoint tend to set her more at her ease. That unfortunate man was no seasoned toper of the old school, but a confirmed tippler of the modern one, whose worn-out system was far less able to withstand excesses than that of an ordinary person in good health. Not many glasses of champagne were required to throw him off his balance, and, unhappily, loss of balance with him was always accompanied, in the first instance, by loss of temper. "Here, take away this pheasant," he called out to the butler; "it isn't fit for human food, by Jove! What beastly dinners you manage to give one, Kate! One would think you did it on purpose. I believe you *do* do it on purpose—hanged if I don't!"

Mrs. Pierpoint made no reply to this very unjust accusation. She was accustomed to such outbreaks and knew what was the only cure for them, as did also the butler. A little more champagne effected a change in Mr. Pierpoint which was, perhaps, a change for the better; though Hope, personally, was not quite sure that she considered it so. Leaning back in his chair, he surveyed her for a few minutes, smiling

blandly and approvingly; after which he said, with laborious distinctness of enunciation:

"It's awfully kind of you, you know, to take us like this in the rough, you know. This is the sort of thing I enjoy. I should like to have a little dinner like this every night of my life. Shouldn't you?"

"Perhaps that would be rather too much of a good thing," answered Hope, who certainly thought that it would.

Mr. Pierpoint shook his head. "Can't have too much of a good thing," he said solemnly. "Can't have too much of your company, Mrs.—Mrs.—well, it don't matter. Names don't matter. No matter names, s'long as the heart's in the right place" (here he slapped his waistcoat). "Don't you agree with me, eh?"

"Oh yes, entirely; I am sure you are quite right," answered Hope in some haste, thinking to herself, "I wonder how long it will be before he slides off his chair."

However, having reached this maudlin condition, he did not get much worse, and, beyond a tendency to run all his words into one, displayed no further symptoms of intoxication until dinner was over. During the last quarter of an hour Hope had not dared to look at Mrs. Pierpoint; but when she did so she was sincerely sorry for the poor little woman, whose pretty face looked pale and old. They were alone together for a few minutes while they were putting on their wraps, and Hope was half-afraid that her hostess was going to apologise. But she did not make that mistake, only remarking: "I think Marmaduke and I had better drive to the theatre together, if you will take the others in your carriage."

When this arrangement was communicated to Mr. Pierpoint, who was wrestling with his ulster, he seemed inclined to raise objections to it; but, as nobody listened to him, he resigned himself to what could not be helped, and, after making a bad shot at the brougham and rushing out into the middle of the street, was brought back by the footman and driven away.

"He'll go to sleep as soon as we get to the theatre; it will be all right," whispered Bertie to Hope, who did not choose to make any response to this encouraging assurance.

He thought she was annoyed with him for having been the means of taking her to the house of a man who did not know how to behave himself; but in truth she was thinking very little about him, and ceased to think about him at all when they reached the theatre and when he devoted his conversation to Carry. The two men were seated in the row of stalls behind the ladies. Bertie leant forward and whispered into Carry's ear; while Mr. Pierpoint, as had been predicted, fell asleep and ceased from troubling. The play, to which Hope only lent a very small share of her attention, was one which had had a great success. There was a young and foolish bride in it; there was a virtuous husband, who was sent away somewhere to the wars; there was an unprincipled foreigner; there was a clever widow, whose mission it was to avert catastrophes and make everybody happy in the last act; there was a fine old English country gentleman, who wore a scarlet coat and top-boots all the year round, in accordance with the well-known habit of English country gentlemen; and there was a simple-minded dragoon, in love with the clever widow, who ejaculated "Haw!" at frequent

intervals and was rewarded each time by the peals of laughter which so subtle a stroke of wit would naturally provoke. How the wicked foreigner nearly, but not quite, eloped with the fair bride; how the virtuous husband appeared upon the scene in full uniform at the most inopportune moment; how a duel and a subsequent appeal to the Divorce Court seemed quite unavoidable; and how the widow and the dragoon saved the situation between them—all this Hope saw and heard with a profound indifference for which neither play nor players were to blame. In imagination she was far away from that hot, crowded theatre; she had crossed the Atlantic and the wide plains of the North American continent, and had penetrated to the least-frequented district of frozen Wyoming. The landscape at which she was gazing was wild and forbidding in the extreme. Gigantic black precipices hemmed it in; above and beneath them was a universal white winding sheet, across which the wind swept, sending columns of whirling drift before it. In the foreground, stretched upon his face on the snow, was the prostrate figure of a man, the rifle which he would never raise to his shoulder again lying beside him. She was for ever summoning up some such pleasing picture as this before her mind's eye. It was true that Dick, in his last letter, had informed her (with evident regret) that he had decided to abandon the plan of wintering in a certain valley whence egress would be impossible before the spring. "It would hardly do," he had remarked, "to cut ourselves off altogether from reach of letters and telegrams." He had, however, warned her that his chances of despatching a letter even from their present quarters would be infrequent and irregular;

and, as a matter of fact, she had not heard from him for some weeks.

Being thus provided with ample material for self-torment, it is scarcely surprising that she should have forgotten all about the Pierpoints, and Carry, and Bertie Cunningham, and that she should even have failed to hear one or two timid observations which the latter addressed to her over her shoulder. But it so happened that there was some one among the audience who was more observant—some one who from his place in the last row of stalls had been watching Hope intently ever since her entrance, and upon whom neither her melancholy abstraction, nor Bertie's futile attempts to get a word from her, nor Miss Herbert's air of quiet triumph were lost. It was not by accident that Jacob was at the theatre that evening. He had received a note from Hope two days before, in which she had upbraided him for not calling in Bruton Street, and had begged him to come and dine any night that week that suited him, as she had only one engagement—which engagement she specified. Jacob had declined the invitation to dinner, not caring to force his company upon Miss Herbert, but had at once secured a stall at the theatre, and, having taken possession of it, saw—not indeed exactly what he had expected to see, but something that was quite as bad. It was easy to him to interpret the drama in pantomime which was being enacted a few yards in front of him, and which interested him a great deal more than the drama on the stage.

"She is trying to break with that fellow," he thought; "she won't speak to him, and she is making herself miserable about him, and he is revenging himself by

pretending to make love to Miss Herbert. Confound him! I should like to break his neck! No, I shouldn't though. If she loves him, that is enough; I don't wish him any harm. I should like to put him in Herbert's place, if that would make her happy. Only I don't think I should ever care to see her again afterwards. What can she find to love in such a puppy! It must be his handsome face, I suppose—I'll allow him a handsome face."

In process of time the play came to an end; the actors were duly applauded; the audience poured itself out into the narrow passages; Mr. Pierpoint woke up, quite sober and subdued, and our friends prepared to follow the stream. At the bottom of the staircase they were kept waiting some little time, and while Hope was standing there a voice close to her ear whispered: "Am I *never* to be forgiven?"

She started and looked at the speaker with mingled surprise and displeasure, but made no reply.

"It is cruel to treat me like this," Bertie went on in a low, hurried voice, "and—and—it isn't wise. Everybody must notice it."

"Oh, I see," said Hope, with a cold smile. "I certainly don't wish people to notice anything peculiar in my treatment of you, and if you will suggest any change, I will try to make it. What would you like me to do?"

"It does seem to me," continued Bertie, in an aggrieved tone, "that my punishment has been sufficiently heavy. Because I forgot myself for one instant I have lost your friendship for ever. Well, I brought that upon myself, and I suppose I have no right to complain.

But surely, for your own sake as well as mine, it might be better at least to answer when I speak to you."

"Perhaps it might be better still that you should not speak to me. But of course I shall answer you when you do. I always have."

"Excuse me; three or four times this evening I said something to you, and you never so much as turned your head. It was rather marked—and rather unnecessary, I think."

"You should have spoken louder," said Hope. "I am sorry that I was so rude; but my rudeness was not intentional. To tell you the truth, I had quite forgotten that you were there."

Bertie drew back, looking somewhat crestfallen. The explanation was not a flattering one, and its veracity was indubitable. No doubt it must be difficult for a man who has been uniformly successful in any line to believe in his own failure, and the record of Bertie's amatory successes had hitherto been broken by no single defeat; but there was something in Hope's quiet assertion that she had forgotten his existence during an entire evening, while he had been sitting within a couple of feet of her, which was more convincing than any anger or protestation. Matters being as they were, he said to himself that this was perhaps just as well; but he was piqued and mortified nevertheless; and—matters being as they were—this also was perhaps just as well.

Jacob, who from the background had witnessed the brief colloquy between Captain Cunningham and Mrs. Herbert, walked away, shrugging his shoulders slightly. "How will it end?" he muttered under his breath.

"But of course it will end as such affairs always end. There are only two ways out of it, and both would bring misery upon her. At least, there is a possible third way. Yes; there's the third way."

And as he glided through the crowd of vehicles which were waiting outside, this third way revealed itself to him in a light more clear and more startling than it had as yet assumed.

"Will you be very kind and come home with me?" Mrs. Pierpoint said to Hope. "I told the servants to have supper ready, and we could talk over the play before we went to bed. Marmaduke has gone off to his club. Please do," she added, noticing Hope's hesitation; "I have a reason for asking you."

Her manner was much more friendly than it had been earlier in the evening, and Hope did not like to refuse—particularly as Mrs. Pierpoint's reason was easily divined. The latter made it more clear by adding: "If you will come in the brougham with me, I daresay Captain Cunningham will look after Miss Herbert."

CHAPTER XIII.

BERTIE ACCOMMODATES HIMSELF TO CIRCUMSTANCES.

MRS. PIERPOINT was never known to have a bad horse in her stables, or an indifferent coachman upon her box. The light brougham which Hope had been requested to enter was whirled through the streets with such rapidity that she and her companion were still trying to hit upon some civil and unmeaning speech wherewith to open a conversation when their drive came to an end. "Let me take you up to my bedroom," Mrs. Pierpoint said. "The others are sure not to be here for some time yet."

Hope complied, wondering rather at the invitation, and was presently introduced into one of the brightest and cosiest little apartments that she had ever seen. Perhaps there were more pictures, and brackets, and odds and ends of china about it than most people would consider suitable to a bedroom, and perhaps, like the drawing-room, it was somewhat overcrowded with furniture; but then, to be sure, the lady to whom it belonged did not require a very large amount of space to accommodate her own person. She pushed an easy-chair to the fireside for Hope, then drew another to the opposite corner, and, seating herself in it, toasted her tiny feet upon the fender, while she held her fan between her face and the blaze, without speaking.

"How pretty your room is!" said Hope, for the sake of saying something.

Mrs. Pierpoint glanced round the four walls. "Yes," she agreed; "I like to have pretty things about me, and pretty faces too—when I can. Of course one can't always."

Hope made no reply; because, at the moment, she happened to be thinking of the absent Marmaduke's face, which certainly could not be said to come under that denomination; and Mrs. Pierpoint went on: "I think it was Captain Cunningham's good looks that first made me take to him. He *is* good-looking, don't you think so?"

"Oh yes; nobody could think anything else," assented Hope, rather hurriedly, and was about to change the subject; but Mrs. Pierpoint, who had not dragged Bertie into the conversation by the hair of his head without intention, was too quick for her.

"Beauty is of less importance to a man than to a woman," said she; "but it is an advantage to everybody. I don't mean that I made a friend of Captain Cunningham because I admired the shape of his nose; but I daresay that helped to attract me to him in the first instance, and I am sure that a great many of his friendships have been made in that way. When one knows him, one likes him for himself, I think. But perhaps you don't like him?"

"Not very much," Hope confessed.

Mrs. Pierpoint closed her fan, and, resting her chin upon the top of it, gazed at the glowing coals. "I could see that by the way in which you behaved to him at dinner and at the theatre this evening," she remarked quietly. "I don't wonder at it, because most likely you have found out his defects, and I can understand that they are not of the kind that you

would pardon very readily. My standpoint is altogether different. I am ever so much older than either of you, and as one grows old one becomes less and less exacting. Captain Cunningham is a spoilt boy, and I have a liking for spoilt boys—that is, when they are not utterly spoilt. His virtues are his own and his faults are those of the age, as I forget who said about somebody else. I think he will settle down into a very decent, and perhaps useful member of society. I suppose,” she added, somewhat abruptly, “you know that he is going to marry your sister-in-law.”

“Do you mean that he has actually proposed to her?” asked Hope, a good deal startled.

Mrs. Pierpoint laughed. “I don’t know that he has; but I trust that he is either doing it now or will be in the course of a few minutes. At any rate, we will stay up here a little longer, if you don’t mind, so as to give him every opportunity.”

Hope made a sign of assent.

“Will it turn out happily, do you think?” she inquired presently. “For Carry, I mean.”

“I think there is a very fair prospect of it,” Mrs. Pierpoint answered. “It is quite impossible to foretell how any marriage will turn out; but one thing I know—and so do you, I daresay—Carry will never be happy unless she does marry Captain Cunningham. As for him, he will accommodate himself to circumstances. It is his nature to do that, and it is not his nature to be unhappy under any circumstances.”

“I don’t feel sure of him, somehow,” said Hope, after a pause. “He seems to me to be so thoroughly selfish.”

"Like the rest of them. A selfish man is not necessarily a disagreeable person to live with."

"Perhaps not—if he will consent to live with you at all."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Pierpoint, "if a wife can't keep her husband at home, she has only herself to blame. I was thinking of my own case," she added hastily, after this not very felicitous speech. "I don't generally talk about my own case, but I think a great deal about it, and I feel that I deserve most of the hard things that are said about me."

"I can't agree with you at all!" cried Hope, warmly; "I think you do yourself a great injustice there."

"Do I? If I do, I am erring on the right side; but it does not much matter, either way, for it is far too late to mend now. I have been doing you an injustice, at all events, Mrs. Herbert. May I say as much as that?—and may I beg your pardon? I ought not to have made the mistake, though it was not an unnatural one."

"I suppose it must have been an extremely natural one," said Hope, with a touch of impatience, "since every friend that I have in the world seems to have made it. But I am not like you,—I don't feel disposed to blame myself. At least, I can't see that I have been to blame lately."

"As a general rule, nobody is very much to blame for mistakes of that kind," observed Mrs. Pierpoint. "People judge by appearances: what else have they to judge by?"

"Strangers may," agreed Hope; "but one expects one's friends to have a different standard."

Mrs. Pierpoint made a little grimace. "It is as

well not to expect too much even from one's friends," she remarked.

After this a rather long interval of time elapsed, during which neither of the ladies spoke. At length Hope broke the silence by reverting to a topic nearer her heart than that which they had just been discussing. "You say that a woman is to blame for not keeping her husband at home. But how is she to set about keeping him at home?" she asked.

"It depends chiefly upon whether she wants to keep him at home," Mrs. Pierpoint answered. "If she doesn't—if she is acting only from a sense of duty, a good deal of tact would be required, and I don't know that I should venture to lay down any exact rules. But if she really wishes to have him with her, it is tolerably plain sailing. All she has to do is to let him see that she wishes it."

Hope confessed that she had little confidence in so simple a system of tactics.

"Nevertheless, it is worth trying," Mrs. Pierpoint returned. "It isn't an infallible recipe, I admit; but it is far and away the best that I know. For many years I have neither wished nor tried to keep Marmaduke at home, and that is why I am made the subject of a good deal of undeserved pity, besides some calumny. Shall we go downstairs now? If those two lovers haven't come to an understanding by this time they never will."

The two lovers, as Mrs. Pierpoint was pleased to call them, had now been waiting supperless in the drawing-room for more than half an hour. To neither of them had the somewhat unrefined strategy which had been adopted for their benefit been altogether

welcome. They had maintained a reserved, not to say sulky, demeanour during the drive from the theatre to Green Street, and when, on reaching the house, they found nobody there to receive them, they both looked a little foolish. A thirsty horse will drink readily, if he be allowed to choose his own time and place for so doing; it is the being led to the water that naturally rouses an obstinate spirit in him.

However, Bertie was not long in recovering his temper and *aplomb*. He laughed and said to his companion, "Do you know why Mrs. Pierpoint has deserted us in this uncivil way?"

"I haven't an idea," answered Carry shortly.

"If you would like to know, I can tell you. It is because Mrs. Pierpoint is a great friend of mine, and because she wants to do me a good turn. She knows that there is something which I should like to say to you, if only I had the pluck, and she is determined that I shall say it. For ever so long—more than a year, I think—she has been trying to screw my courage up to the sticking-point."

"I should not have imagined that you were so timid," remarked Carry quietly; though her heart was beating fast.

"I have some reason to be timid. It isn't quite the easiest thing in the world for a penniless beggar like me to ask an heiress to be his wife. And that is what I have got to do."

Carry neither spoke nor looked at him, so he continued: "I was very nearly telling you all about it that afternoon in Dublin Bay; but I couldn't make up my mind to begin with those fellows in the boat, you know; and then I was sent off to Egypt; and then——"

"And then Dutch Oven, in the most unexpected way, won the Leger," put in Carry, without moving a muscle.

This was rather disconcerting. "I didn't think you would answer me like that," said Bertie reproachfully.

Carry laughed. "How did you think that I should answer you? I only ask out of curiosity."

"I thought you would give me credit for—for loving you for your own sake."

"But is that the case? Tell me the truth about it; I shan't mind hearing the truth, whatever it may be, and I shan't think the worse of you for being honest with me."

Bertie hung his head. His system of ethics was still very much what it had been in his schooldays; he could not tell a direct lie, though he would have seen no great harm in insinuating one. "I shouldn't have asked you to marry me if you had been poor," he blurted out at last. "You know as well as anybody that I couldn't have done that."

"But if you had loved me you would have told me so, without asking me to marry you," returned Carry, betraying a knowledge of her suitor's character for which that young gentleman was hardly prepared.

"You reject me, then?" he said.

Carry looked at him with a queer sort of smile. "You wouldn't take me without my money; you wouldn't take my money without me," she said. "What is to be done? Money you must have; and there would be no use at all in my making you my heir, because I am one of those perfectly healthy people whom nothing short of a railway accident is likely to remove for the next forty years or so."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," exclaimed Bertie, reddening slightly. "I'm not such a brute as you think—I really am not. You might easily find a better husband, there's no doubt about that; but if you will have me, such as I am, I will do my best to be worthy of you."

"As far as worthiness goes, there is probably not much to choose between us," answered Carry, holding out her hand to him. "We are both of us running a risk; but I suppose there must be an element of risk in every marriage. Dick once told me, in his charmingly candid way, that I could be a confoundedly disagreeable woman; but I believe he was kind enough to add that I could also be confoundedly agreeable, when I chose. I shall endeavour to be confoundedly agreeable to you." Then suddenly the woman's real passionate nature broke through this crust of irony for a moment. "Oh, Bertie," she exclaimed, "try to care a little for me! I should be satisfied with a very little."

He told her that he cared for her a great deal; and perhaps, in a sense, he did. Certainly he would have been very ungrateful if he had not. He was touched by her generosity and by the love which he had done so little to earn; possibly also his vanity, which had been deeply wounded by one woman that evening, was peculiarly susceptible to another woman's healing touch; for, in truth, vanity is more profoundly rooted in all of us than we either admit or suspect, and when hope flew out of Pandora's box, vanity (which is only another word for emptiness) must have remained behind—no getting rid of that until the box itself moulders away. Out of nothing nothing can come;

but during the next few minutes Bertie registered certain inward and laudable vows which were based, let us trust, upon some more substantial foundation than that just mentioned; and when the interview was put an end to by the entrance of Mrs. Pierpoint, he had already fulfilled that lady's prediction and was accommodating himself to circumstances.

Mrs. Pierpoint saw at a glance that all was as it should be and made herself proportionally amiable; but it was hardly in her power to render the little supper-party a gay one. Her guests were all of them more or less self-conscious and uncomfortable; and indeed she herself was neither very sorry to be rid of them nor in particularly good spirits after they had left her. She had brought about the end for which she had so long been striving, and, having done so, it was but natural that she should begin to sigh over some of the probable results of her handiwork. She was fond of Bertie Cunningham, who had made her his adviser and confidant whenever he had been in trouble (which had been pretty constantly), and she was well aware that a bachelor friend and a married friend are two different persons. "Now that I am going down the hill, I suppose I shall become more and more lonely every year," was the melancholy reflection with which she went upstairs to bed.

When Hope and Carry were driving homewards, the latter said quietly, "Bertie Cunningham and I are engaged to be married."

"Oh, I am so very glad!" cried Hope warmly.

And in truth she was glad, both on her sister-in-law's account and on her own; though she could not help feeling some misgivings with regard to the future

conduct of so fickle an individual as Bertie had shown himself to be.

"You think I am foolish, don't you?" Carry said. "Very likely I am, but at any rate I have counted the cost of what I am going to do, and I am old enough to know my own mind. Thank you for coming up to London with me."

Carry's sober and rather humble tone went to Hope's heart. She felt for her companion's hand and gave it an encouraging squeeze; and then the two women kissed each other. So that, upon the whole, the evening ended a good deal more pleasantly than it had begun.

CHAPTER XIV.

"CAIN."

JACOB STILES was seated in his studio in Gower Street, plunged in meditations which the frown on his forehead showed to be anxious or unpleasant ones. If, as is sometimes averred, the furniture of a man's room be a key to the order of his mind, Jacob's character must have been simple to a fault. The large, bare chamber in which he was at work was his drawing-room and dining-room, as well as his studio, and had served him in these three capacities for a considerable length of time; yet it could hardly be said to contain a single superfluous table or chair, and it was absolutely devoid of adornment or decoration of any kind. An acquaintance of Jacob's, happening once to visit him upon a matter of business (nobody ever visited him from any other motive), expressed some surprise that a man of so much taste should not have cared to surround himself with objects more pleasing to the eye; to which Jacob made the rather quaint reply that he was not sufficiently fond of himself to lay out money in that way. It was literally true that he was not at all fond of himself, and he derived a sort of grim satisfaction from dispensing with luxuries. He had perpetually before his mind's eye a vision of what he might have been and would have been but for an unaccountable act of folly, for which he did not always feel inclined to accept the entire responsibility. Sometimes he was able to identify himself with this potential personage; and there were moments when the potential Jacob saw the real Jacob with such startling distinct-

ness and despised him so heartily that the real Jacob was in appreciable danger of having a rope twisted round his neck.

Any one who had seen this despondent young artist on the morning with which we are now concerned might have surmised that one of the above-mentioned fits of depression was upon him. Brushes and pallet in hand, he was seated before his easel, on which rested an almost completed picture—that picture, entitled "Cain," which has since become so deservedly notorious. He had added a few touches to it in the course of the morning, but was neither looking at it nor thinking of it now. Jacob was a slow worker and a thorough one. Naturally patient and methodical, he had that desire for perfection, that determination that no detail of his work should fall below the very best that he had it in his power to produce, which are becoming more and more rare in this age of hurry. His conception of Cain was a somewhat unusual one, that hapless offender being depicted as a slight, black-browed, beardless man, no match in point of physique for the brawny young giant who lay dead at his feet. The pool of blood which seemed to be trickling slowly towards the spectator, the gray flesh-tints of the corpse, the waving cornfields in the background, and the red glow of the morning sky—all these were faithfully and admirably rendered; but the fascinating feature of the composition was the expression of Cain's face—a mixture of fear and curiosity, with a lurking suspicion of triumph—the half-puzzled look of the first murderer, who, until his doom fell upon him from Heaven, may have felt some doubt as to whether what he had just done should be accounted a crime or a victory.

Jacob sat pondering for a considerable time, and then rising, with a sigh, threw a cloth over his picture. He was not in the mood for painting, and he knew better than to paint when he was not in the mood. The man who waits for inspiration may sometimes have to wait long; but the man who forces himself to finish a task when his heart is not in his work will certainly not do his best, and may, if he be conscientious, find himself compelled to undo all that he has done. Jacob had put on his hat, and had decided to try what a little fresh air would do for him, when somebody rapped loudly on the door with a stick, and, without waiting for permission to enter, marched into the room.

It was very seldom that Tristram was to be seen in any studio except his own; but this was not the first visit that he had paid to Jacob's gloomy habitation. He was, as he had told Hope, interested in Jacob—interested in him as an artist, and possibly even more interested in him as an individual. Jacob, on his side, had taken a fancy to the elder man, whose genius he appreciated, and who, in a rough sort of way, had shown him more goodwill than he was accustomed to meet with from his fellow-mortals.

Tristram walked up to the young man and surveyed him slowly from head to foot. "Well," he said, at length, "what is the matter with *you*?"

"Nothing is the matter, Mr. Tristram," answered Jacob.

"What?—a face like that all about nothing? See what it is to be young! At my age one can't afford to despair upon such small provocation."

"When I said nothing, I meant everything," ob-

served Jacob. "Nothing worse than usual is the matter with me, and everything is always the matter. I suffer from an incurable complaint."

Tristram looked hard at the speaker and smiled ironically. "Dear me!" he ejaculated. "And what is the name of this deadly disease, if one may ask?"

"I don't know," answered Jacob. "Perhaps it isn't sufficiently common to have earned one; I'm sure I hope it isn't."

"Oh," said Tristram, laughing a little, "you're young; you're very young! If I were to make a careful diagnosis, I daresay I could tell you what is wrong with you; *on ne meurt pas de cette maladie-là*. But never mind; we'll call it indigestion, if you like. What have you got here?"

He walked up to the easel, flicked the cloth off the canvas, and started slightly. With his hands behind his back, he contemplated the picture silently for some minutes before he remarked: "That's an odd idea. One has met with a good deal of self-portraiture both in literature and art; but I don't know that I ever before heard of a man who chose to hand his features down to posterity as those of Cain."

"I suppose it is rather like me," Jacob said consideringly. "I didn't intend it to be so."

"Come, come! do you mean to tell me that you hadn't a looking-glass before you when you painted that face?"

"I made some use of the looking-glass for my studies, I confess; it isn't the first time that I have had to do that, in order to catch a particular expression. But the resemblance of feature is accidental—so far as there is a resemblance. If you look again, I think

you will see that Cain's nose is longer than mine, and that his eyes are set rather nearer together. Also there is a slight backward slope of the forehead."

"It must be very slight," said Tristram smiling; "about one in a hundred, I should say; and I am not prepared to swear that your own—— However, all this is neither here nor there. Whether the chief figure is a portrait or whether he isn't you have painted a grand picture."

"Do you think so?" said Jacob indifferently.

"Yes, young man, I think so. I think it better than anything that you have done yet—bolder, more striking, superior in every way. And if you don't consider my praise worth having, I can't help it."

"Of course your praise is worth having, Mr. Tristram," answered Jacob; "to me I suppose it ought to be about the most valuable thing in the world that I can possibly get. But I don't feel as if I could care much about anything to-day. Perhaps you yourself may sometimes have had the same sort of sensation."

"Oh yes," said Tristram, feeling in his pocket for a pipe, which he slowly filled and lighted—"yes, I have had your complaint, and so have most men. It isn't incurable; although everybody thinks it so while it lasts."

"Excuse me," began Jacob; "but I don't think you quite understand——"

"Excuse me; but I make so bold as to feel pretty sure that I do. Have you been to call in Bruton Street yet?"

Jacob shook his head.

"Take my advice, and don't go there. Take my advice, and go somewhere else. Go clean away—to

the other side of the world, if you choose—and don't come back again until you are convalescent. I may mention, for your comfort, that I *have* been in Bruton Street, and that, from what I saw there, I am persuaded that the catastrophe which you and I dreaded will not occur."

Tristram had seated himself, and, with eyes half closed, was drawing placidly at his pipe. Had he glanced at his neighbour's face while uttering the above sentences, he would probably have thought him more like Cain than ever.

"What catastrophe?" asked Jacob sharply; "I don't remember saying that I dreaded any catastrophe. And, Mr. Tristram, are you accusing me of—I hardly like to say it—of being in love with Mrs. Herbert?"

Tristram shrugged his shoulders. "My good fellow, what have you been telling me for the last month?"

"Certainly not that. Please never say such a thing again. I am astonished that you should have thought I could be guilty of such—such——"

"Presumption?"

"Well, presumption if you like. I am by way of being a republican, and thinking that one human being is made of much the same clay as another (though I am not at all sure that I do think so); but setting all that aside, you must see that if I had allowed myself to feel in that way towards Mrs. Herbert, I should have been guilty of something a great deal worse than presumption."

Tristram could not help laughing a little.

"I apologise," he said; "but all this is becoming rather involved. It would be a dreadful thing in you to fall in love with Mrs. Herbert, because she is a

married woman; but apparently it wouldn't be a dreadful thing in her to be in love with young Cunningham."

"You may depend upon it that she would think it so," returned Jacob quickly. "If she were in love with him, she would never be able to persuade herself that it wasn't wrong, as some women would."

"But perhaps she is not in love with him. You gave me a fine fright about her, I admit; I daresay it was I, and not you, who spoke of catastrophes. I am glad to say that since I have seen her I am inclined to think that you may be mistaken about the whole business."

Jacob made a gesture of dissent. "I am not mistaken. I was at the theatre last night, and I watched them together. They were all there—she and Miss Herbert and Cunningham, and that Mrs. Pierpoint who was at Farndon at the time of the theatricals, when Cunningham managed to break his leg. I wish it had been his skull!"

"He would have survived that most likely. What did he do at the theatre to rouse your wrath?"

"Oh, nothing particular. He was annoyed because she wouldn't talk to him, and, by way of revenging himself, he pretended to get up a great flirtation with Miss Herbert—that was all. I think they had a kind of explanation afterwards, while they were waiting for their carriage. If you had seen it all, your wrath would have been as much roused as mine, I daresay. Knowing what she is and what he is, one can't help feeling the pity of it."

"And sometimes you feel the pity of it to the ex-

tent of wishing to crack his skull, do you?" said Tristram, with a quick look at the speaker.

"No; not now. The only thing I wish for is her happiness, and I doubt whether I could bring that about by breaking Captain Cunningham's head. If I thought that I could, I should be very pleased to do it—and to be hung for it," answered Jacob composedly.

Tristram knocked the ashes out of his pipe, which he replaced in his pocket, and then, getting up, laid one of his large, heavy hands upon the young man's shoulder. "Stiles," said he, "this sort of thing won't do. You have got into a nasty, morbid state of mind; you have been in it for a long time; you were in it when you painted that picture, which is an unpleasant picture, though it's a powerful one—and you must fight your way back to sanity again. I know pretty well how you feel; perhaps I have had some experience of the same kind myself; and perhaps I may once have thought that I shouldn't mind breaking a certain person's head and being hung for it. But men like you and me were sent into this world to do something better than to get ourselves hung. Candidly speaking, I suspect that I am a stronger man, mentally as well as physically, than you are. Therefore I don't advise you simply to stay at home and stick to your work, which is what I did. I advise you to try the effect of a complete change of life and scene. Get out of England; widen your horizon; see as much of the world as you can. The world isn't Paradise, I grant you; but there's a good deal of honest enjoyment to be got out of it, and, anyhow, it is better to be contented with it than to cry for the moon. Now, look here; I

don't know anything about your means or resources; but if there is any difficulty about money, you must let me help you out. We are fellow-workers, and it is the privilege of an old bachelor, who has more money than he knows what to do with, to lend a hand to the young ones, who haven't had time to lay by much yet."

"Thank you, Mr. Tristram," answered Jacob; "it is very kind of you to make such an offer, and still more kind of you to compare me to yourself; because there can be no real comparison between us—of any kind. But I can quite well afford to go abroad, and I hope never to be any man's debtor again." He continued, after a moment of silence: "Perhaps I will take your advice. I have been thinking of going away for some time past, and very likely I shall go; I can't say for certain yet. There is one thing that I should be glad to consult you about, if I may."

"I am quite at your service," answered Tristram.

"Well, you see I have represented Cain with a ploughshare in his hand. Could that be called an anachronism, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He was a tiller of the field; so I presume that he must have had a ploughshare of some kind."

"He might have had a wooden one; only that would almost presuppose the possession of some sharp cutting instrument. People are particular about these accessories nowadays; it wasn't so in the time of the old masters. Now, do you consider that art ought or ought not to be independent of such absolute fidelity to facts?"

In this way the wily Jacob effected a change of

subject, and eventually got rid of his visitor without any further references to Mrs. Herbert or Captain Cunningham.

CHAPTER XV. JACOB'S CONFESSION.

No one, however honest and blameless, can expect to live through his allotted term in this world without finding himself in one or two awkward situations. It must be extremely awkward for two sovereigns who have just been at war to embrace after the conclusion of peace; even two parliamentary opponents who have been accusing one another (in parliamentary language) of knavery and imbecility, and mean to do it again on the first opportunity, may feel some passing awkwardness when they meet in private life; and certainly it is very awkward for a lady who has received a protestation of unalterable love to be called upon to congratulate the protestor upon his engagement to somebody else. At any rate, Hope thought so. Her pleasure at Bertie Cunningham's engagement to her sister-in-law was seriously interfered with by her perplexity as to what she should say to him upon the subject: indeed, she went so far as to ask herself whether it was absolutely necessary that she should say anything at all. But this was only a passing weakness. The bad moment obviously could not be shirked; and when it came, it proved to be not such a very bad moment after all.

Bertie, as in duty bound, came to call in Bruton

Street on the day succeeding that of his proposal and acceptance, and Hope after a short time descended to the drawing-room, where, fortified by the presence of Carry, she said what was suitable in as few words as might be. Bertie replied somewhat perfunctorily, but without embarrassment. "Thanks, awfully," he said. "You were quite prepared to hear of it, I know. I mean, I have never made any secret to you of what my—wishes were."

He could not help that slight pause before the word "wishes," which Hope was free to interpret as she chose. Perhaps he meant her to understand that there were other things connected with his past and present conduct which he had been and was equally unable to help.

"I cannot accuse myself of having concealed my wishes either," observed Carry with rather inopportune self-satire; "so the customary exclamations of pleased surprise may be omitted on this occasion."

After that it was not very easy to make any further remarks, exclamatory or other; but Hope had made up her mind to be very gracious and to let bygones be bygones. She had also made up her mind that Dick's prohibition no longer applied, under the altered circumstances, and that Bertie might now be asked down to Farndon, whither she herself was most anxious to return. So she said: "I don't think we shall be in London much longer—that is, unless Carry has a great deal of shopping to do—but I hope you will come and stay with us in the country, Captain Cunningham, when we go. I am sure Berkshire air must be better than London fogs for an invalid."

Bertie murmured that he should be delighted. He

could say no less; although in truth the prospect held out to him did not strike him as being precisely fraught with delightful promises.

But Carry looked grateful. "I have done all my shopping for the present," she declared, "and we will make a move as soon as you like, Hope. It will be fearfully dull work for you, I am afraid," she added, with a touch of compunction; "but I suppose you really do prefer the country to London."

"I really do," answered Hope, smiling; "and I shall try and induce Jacob Stiles to come and keep me company."

It was a proof of Miss Herbert's altered sentiments towards her sister-in-law that she did not merely shrug her shoulders at this speech, but took the trouble to excuse it for Bertie's benefit. "There is a sort of freemasonry between artists," she was good enough to explain. "They have all kinds of things to say to each other which we commonplace people can't enter into."

"No doubt," agreed Bertie, gravely; and presently he asked his *fiancée* whether she wasn't thinking of looking up Mrs. Pierpoint about tea-time. Because, if she was, he would walk round there with her.

"So that is the end of it all!" thought Hope, when she was left in sole possession of the drawing-room; and it cannot be denied that the lameness and impotence of the conclusion caused a spice of annoyance to be mingled with her sense of relief. It was a little humiliating to have shouted "Fire!" to the four winds of heaven about a conflagration which one jug of cold water, promptly administered, would probably have sufficed to subdue. She was still unable to under-

stand Bertie Cunningham: it was difficult to her to believe that any man could be so fickle, so self-seeking, and so little ashamed of being seen in his true colours; but she felt that she understood him rather better than she had done a few months back, and it occurred to her that if she had known him then as she knew him now, she would have troubled herself less about his offence—would perhaps even have refrained from mentioning it to her husband. “Yet surely it was best to tell the whole truth,” she thought. “At least, Dick will never be able to say that I have concealed anything from him; and when he comes back——”

Then suddenly it struck her that she had now an excellent reason for hastening the date of Dick's return. It seemed unlikely that either Bertie or Carry would desire a long engagement, and the fitness of things clearly required that the head of the family should be in England in time to give away his sister on her marriage. Hope resolved that she would get the wedding-day fixed with all possible despatch, and that the same letter which conveyed the news of the engagement to Dick should place before him the desirability of his at once quitting savage life for civilisation. By dint of longing for his return, she had persuaded herself that all things would go well when that event should take place. True, what had happened was no more than what he had predicted; but it was not upon the proof of Bertie's instability that Hope counted to gain her husband's affection. What she knew for certain was that he would find in her a very different woman from the one whom he had left; and a smile spread itself over her face as she began to calculate how long it would be before Dick could possibly

reach Europe, and to wonder how she would contrive to while away the time during the interval. This reminded her of Jacob Stiles; and she was just about to compose a friendly little note to that recluse when Mr. Stiles himself was announced.

Jacob, fresh from the interview with Tristram which has been described, and from certain prolonged musings of his own which had followed it, exhibited a countenance somewhat graver and more morose than usual; but Hope, who had learnt how to manage him, and was aware that it always took fully five minutes of careful management to make him smile, assumed that he was only in his normal state of dissatisfaction with things in general.

"At last!" she exclaimed, as she shook hands with him. "I really did not think that you would have allowed us to be in London without finding out where Bruton Street is. I was upon the point of writing to you to ask what you meant by being so unfriendly; but since you have come without being summoned I suppose you must be forgiven."

Jacob leant against the mantelpiece and looked down at the fire. "I generally prefer to wait until I am summoned," he said slowly.

"I know you do, and that is just what I complain of. If all one's friends acted upon that principle, what a lively existence one would lead!"

"But I am not one of your friends, Mrs. Herbert."

"Thank you. Your remarks have the merit of candour, at any rate."

Jacob frowned instead of smiling. "I think you know what I mean," he returned. "In one way of speaking you have been more than a friend to me;

but not even your kindness can ever put me in the position of your equal; and so——”

“And so, because you will persist in that utterly absurd and wrong notion, I am to go down on my knees to you every time that I want you to come and see me.”

“No; only I cannot come to your house without being asked. You would not mind my calling like an ordinary visitor; but other people might.”

“I don't know what other people have a right to object to my visitors,” answered Hope; “but, at all events, I am glad that you have been inconsistent enough to call to-day.”

“Ah, that is an exception. I came to-day because perhaps I may not see you again for a long time. I am thinking of going abroad.”

“Oh, are you? I am so sorry!” cried Hope, in a tone of sincere disappointment. “I had been rather counting upon getting you to keep me company at Farndon and give me a few more art-lectures.”

“Are you going back to Farndon, then?” asked Jacob, looking up at her for the first time. “If you would really care to have me there I will join you and stay as long as I am wanted, with the greatest pleasure.”

“Oh, no,” answered Hope, laughing a little at the promptitude of his self-sacrifice; “it is very good of you to suggest it; but of course I must not interfere with your plans.”

“I have no plans, properly speaking; only a very vague scheme. Will you be alone at Farndon?”

“Carry will be with me, and Captain Cunningham—in spite of which I expect to be a good deal alone.

But that is really not a sufficient reason for your giving up any scheme, however vague it may be."

"I consider it more than a sufficient reason," answered Jacob decisively. "It is such a rare sensation to me to feel that I can be of the slightest service to any one that I hope you will allow me to indulge in that luxury for once. As for my journey, it is a matter of no consequence whether I set out upon it next week, or next month, or next year."

Hope protested a little longer; but did not venture to hint, as she might have done to a less morbidly sensitive person, that her desire for his society was not, after all, so very strong as to override all other considerations. She would have been very much astonished had she been informed of the nature of the service which Jacob believed himself to be about to render to her. To that mistaken observer the position of affairs was as clear as daylight. Hope dreaded the many opportunities which country-house life must afford Captain Cunningham of seeking a private interview with her; she wished to interpose some shield between herself and the man whom she loved, but had no right to love; and he (Jacob) was only too glad to be made use of in that humble capacity, although he did not see why Captain Cunningham need have been invited to Farndon at all. After it had been agreed that he should postpone his visit to foreign countries, for a time at any rate, he harked back to the subject which was always more or less in his thoughts and far too often upon his lips.

"I am glad you are going back to Farndon," he said. "If it is any amusement to you to take painting or riding lessons, I can give them to you there, and

nobody will see anything particularly extraordinary in it, unless it is Miss Herbert, who has never been able to understand why I should not be relegated to the servants' hall; but in London of course I could not thrust myself upon you. At least, I could not run the risk of seeming to thrust myself upon your friends."

"Why will you harp so perpetually upon that string?" exclaimed Hope, with a shade of impatience. "It is useless for me to tell you that you are all wrong about it, and you seem determined to shut your eyes to what is obvious to everybody else. It is you yourself who attach such importance to birth, not the rest of the world. You have only to look in the newspapers to see that society is not so senseless as to shut its doors against distinguished men merely because their fathers did not happen to be distinguished too." And she brought forward a list of well-known soldiers, lawyers, and artists in support of her statement.

But Jacob shook his head. "I have been a pariah for too many years to become anything else now," he said. "Besides, my case is not quite the same as that of the men whom you mention. They may, for anything that I know to the contrary, have had rascals for fathers; but they have at least not been rascals themselves."

"Do you lay claim to be a rascal?" inquired Hope, laughing.

"I was branded as one long ago," answered Jacob gravely, "and the mark won't wash off. Perhaps I had better tell you about it now. I have always meant to tell you some day, and when you have heard my story you will see why I can't be your friend. At least, I

suppose you will. Personally, I think that I have been hardly used—if that matters.”

“If it is anything very—disagreeable, I don’t want to be told about it,” interposed Hope quickly. “You say it happened long ago; and I would rather judge of my friends as I find them than hear what they were before I knew them. Though I don’t believe that you were ever a rascal,” she added.

“Oh yes, I was,” returned Jacob. “I grant you that the same thing might be said of three very respectable men out of any chance four; but then the difference between me and the three respectable ones is that their offences have not been against property. Just consider the Ten Commandments; after all, there are only two of them, the Eighth and the Ninth, which a man is really considered to dishonour himself by breaking. The Sixth hardly counts; there are sure to be extenuating circumstances for a gentleman who commits a breach of the Sixth Commandment. But it is agreed upon all hands that he cannot be a gentleman at all if he breaks the Eighth; and, unluckily for me, the Eighth Commandment was precisely the one which I selected for defiance.”

He paused and threw one of his quick sidelong glances at Hope, whose countenance showed some embarrassment. Upon the spur of the moment, she was not prepared to deny that a thief is a rascal; so she thought she would remain silent until she should be placed in possession of fuller information.

Jacob noticed her hesitation and went on, with a somewhat increased bitterness of tone: “The story might be made long; but I don’t know that that would improve it. Nothing can alter or extenuate the fact

that I forged your husband's name and robbed him of two hundred pounds."

"Oh! What made you do that?" exclaimed Hope involuntarily.

"I have often wondered. It is true that I was afraid of him, and that I had disobeyed him by backing horses—a thing which he had strictly forbidden me to do, at the same time exposing me to temptations which most boys would have found irresistible. Still, if I had made a clean breast of it, he would most likely have paid what I owed and forgiven me. Being a rascal, I did not do that, but had recourse to a forged cheque. Either because I was very young or because I was clean out of my senses, I fancied that the fraud would not be discovered; but of course it was discovered at once, and the natural consequence followed."

"What do you mean?" asked Hope.

"Well, upon second thoughts, perhaps it wasn't the natural consequence. He didn't hand me over to the police, he only horsewhipped me."

Hope could not repress a slight shudder. The thought of physical punishment always appeals forcibly to the imagination of women, and it is not easy for them to help despising a man who has been flogged. Moreover, Jacob's voice was cold and hard, with little of the ring of penitence in it. However, when she looked at him and saw that he was pale to the lips, her heart became softened. "I am sorry that Dick did that," she said gently; "it was not like him."

"Pardon me, I think it was extremely like him; and what was still more like him was the way in which he treated me afterwards—the way in which he has

continued to treat me up to this present day. Mrs. Herbert, I don't complain of the horsewhipping; how could I complain of it? It was just and it was merciful. No man ever deserved a thrashing more thoroughly than I did; and if I had been kicked out of the house after it was over, I might still have considered that I had been let off cheaply. What was not just and what was most cruel, at least in my opinion, was to make me suffer all my life long for a sin, which, bad as it was, was more like the act of a madman than of a responsible being. I didn't expect him to believe in my repentance all at once; he would have been a fool if he had believed in it. But when I had given him proofs, when I had worked hard for years, allowing myself no amusements, spending next to no money, and leading as honest and sober a life as a man could lead, surely he might have consented to blot out the past! But he never has consented. He has never forgotten that I am a forger, never seemed to think it possible that I might recover my lost position, never for one moment ceased to despise me from the bottom of his heart. That is not justice; and that is what I have a right to resent."

"I am perfectly certain you are under a delusion," interposed Hope. "Dick can never have intended to behave to you in that way."

But Jacob, who had been speaking with unwonted excitement, and whose pale cheeks were now slightly flushed, went on, without heeding her: "I have just finished a picture representing Cain; Mr. Tristram, who saw it this morning, said the features were like my own. I daresay they are; I daresay I am like Cain in more ways than one. I have always felt sorry for Cain

and for poor Esau and the rest of the unlucky sinners in the Old Testament, who 'found no place of repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears.' No place of repentance! When one reads that one feels that it can't be true; human nature revolts against the purposeless cruelty of such a doom. And yet that is the doom which your husband would like to pass upon me and upon everybody who has transgressed the limits of his narrow and arbitrary code. *He*, forsooth, would lay down the law! *He* would say, 'This sin shall be pardoned and that shall not,'—*he*, who is himself so immaculate, so unselfish, so considerate of others! Oh, I know that I owe everything to him; I can't pay my debt, do what I may. I paid him the two hundred pounds that I stole from him, and he tossed the money into a drawer. We can never cry quits; I admit that. But I deny that I owe him any affection."

This harangue astonished Hope as much as it distressed her. She had seen enough of Jacob's manner of life at Farndon to know that his grievance was not altogether imaginary; but she could not acquiesce in his distorted view of Dick's character.

"Don't you think," she said gently, "that you may be doing Dick an injustice in fancying that he has done you one? I have never heard him speak of you with anything but kindness—certainly never with contempt. And you must remember," she added, more with the object of putting an end to a painful conversation than because she resented Jacob's strictures, "that he is my husband."

But Jacob's emotion had carried him out of himself, and he took no notice of a hint which at ordinary times he would have been the first to accept. "I am not

likely to forget that!" he exclaimed. "If he had been a good husband to you—if he had done his duty to you, or even attempted to do it, that would have been something in his favour; but his code contains no such obligations." And then as Hope was about to speak—"Mrs. Herbert, you know that he has not made you happy. Can you honestly say that you have been happy with him?"

It would have been easy for Hope to silence her questioner, who was undoubtedly forgetting himself in putting so indiscreet a query; but she had a feeling that it would be ungenerous to do this, and it had never been easy to her to tell a lie. So she made what, under all the circumstances, was a somewhat unfortunate answer:

"If our life has not been as happy as it might have been," she said, dropping her eyes and blushing a little, "that is entirely my own fault."

Her reply produced an unexpectedly sobering effect upon Jacob, who sighed, as he moved a few paces away from the hearth, where he had been standing. "Yes," he murmured presently, speaking rather to himself than to her, "it has been your own fault. At any rate, you would be sure to say so, and I don't know that I should wish you to say anything else; you would not be yourself if you did. Yet you are not really to blame; and the worst of it is that you can never be happy with Herbert. The whole world seems to have got askew, somehow."

"Of course it does, if we look askew at it," returned Hope. "Please don't talk like this any more. When Dick comes back—which will be in a few months I hope—we will try to set the world straight again; and

perhaps that won't be such a hard matter as you suppose. I can quite see that he may have seemed to be unjust to you; but, depend upon it, it was only seeming. I am sure he will be as grieved as I am when he hears how you have suffered. Whatever he may be, he is not hard-hearted."

"You at least are not, Mrs. Herbert, said Jacob, smiling for the first time. "You always see the good in everybody—even when there isn't very much to be seen. After what I have told you, you can't think very well of me; but I daresay you think that I have atoned for my crime as far as it can be atoned for."

"I don't think it was a crime at all," answered Hope; "I think it was what you called it just now, an act of madness. Besides, I suppose that not many of us have repented of our sins as you have."

Jacob took her hand and raised it silently to his lips.

"And now," she continued, "let us put the whole subject out of sight until Dick comes back. By the way, I have never told you all this time that we are to have a wedding in the family soon. Carry accepted Captain Cunningham yesterday."

"What?" exclaimed Jacob, starting back in amazement.

And then Hope suddenly remembered that afternoon when Jacob had brought her a note which she had torn in pieces before his eyes. The recollection brought the colour into her face. Doubtless Jacob, like everybody else (only with rather more excuse than other people), had conceived a mistaken idea of her feelings for Captain Cunningham. It was provoking; but she had no desire to enter upon another explanation with regard to that affair; and she was beginning

hurriedly: "There is nothing to be surprised at—" when, much to her relief, the door was opened and in sailed Lady Jane Lefroy.

Lady Jane embraced her niece affectionately. "My dear Hope, so delighted to see you again! We only came up yesterday; and this afternoon I met your friend, Mrs. Pierpoint, who told me the good news. Isn't that Mr. Stiles? How do you do, Mr. Stiles? I remember you quite well at Farndon, where you were so clever about arranging the theatricals, and that bust that fell down and broke poor Captain Cunningham's leg. I have always been hoping to have an opportunity of telling you how charmed I was with your pictures in the last Academy."

Lady Jane was overflowing with satisfaction and geniality. She sat down and asked if she might be allowed a cup of tea; and as Jacob saw that he would have no more private conversation with Hope that afternoon, he soon took his departure.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN THE WOODS.

NOT long ago two old friends were discussing a proposition, boldly enunciated by the one and courteously combated by the other. "What you say sounds plausible enough," the latter observed; "but as, unfortunately, facts are against you, I am afraid there is a flaw in your theory." And straightway he adduced the facts alluded to, which, indeed, were not such as to admit of denial. "I can't help that," returned the theorist. "I know I am right; and, therefore, if there is a flaw anywhere, it must be in the facts." That closed the debate.

Jacob Stiles, if less audacious than this lady—it is perhaps hardly necessary to mention that the disputant was a lady—was not less tenacious of his theories; nor, even in the face of such a fact as Captain Cunningham's engagement to Miss Herbert, could he bring himself to believe that for so many months past he had been labouring under a complete misapprehension. Certainly he had been staggered by Hope's communication; but after turning it over in his mind awhile, he perceived that what had occurred was not so very inexplicable, after all. "Partly pique and partly prudence," was the conclusion at which he arrived. "The fellow is hard up, I suspect; he would like Miss Herbert's money well enough, and no doubt he has sufficient worldly wisdom to see the absurdity of remaining single and losing a fortune for the sake of a

woman who won't give him any encouragement. I wonder whether it wouldn't be almost better to let him go! How can one tell? He is not worthy to be named on the same day with her; but then I knew that before. I won't do anything yet; I will go down to Farndon and watch them. But if I see that she cares for him still, and that the loss of him would make her wretched for ever——"

Jacob did not put the remainder of his sentence into words, even mentally. There are thoughts with which the mind may be perfectly familiar, but which never find expression until the moment for action comes; and to Jacob that moment had not yet come, though he had long foreseen its approach. During the ensuing week he put the finishing touches to his picture of Cain, and, as soon as the canvas was dry, forwarded it, together with the following note, to Tristram's house:—

"DEAR MR. TRISTRAM—It is not unlikely that I may be out of reach of communication in the early part of next year. As you are aware, I have no friends whom I can ask to act for me in my absence, except yourself. Your kindness has induced me to believe that I may take a liberty with you, and therefore I venture to beg that you will give my picture house-room until the proper time comes for submitting it to the Committee of the Royal Academy, and that you will then send it in in my name. Should I return to England before that date, I will of course relieve you of your charge; but most probably I shall soon make for some outlandish part of the world; and it has occurred to me that, if I were to die or be killed, you might be in doubt as to what to do with the picture.

So I will just mention that, in that event, I should like you to accept it as a small token of gratitude from

“Your faithful and obliged servant,

“JACOB STILES.

“P.S.—In case of the picture becoming your property, pray do as you may think best with regard to showing it publicly; but I may say that my own wish would be decidedly that it should be exhibited.”

This was not the only sign that Jacob contemplated a prolonged and distant tour. Hitherto he had been in the habit of leaving the greater part of his few earthly possessions in Gower Street; but now he packed all these up, paid his landlady a year's rent in advance, and informed her that he could fix no date for his return. He might be back in a few months, or he might (life being uncertain) never come back at all.

“You haven't found me a very troublesome tenant, I think, Mrs. Jones?” he said hesitatingly.

“No, indeed, sir; far from it, sir,” answered the landlady, eyeing her cheque lovingly.

“And—er—you would be sorry to lose me, I dare say?”

“That I should, sir.”

“Oh, well,” said Jacob, in an altered tone, “I suppose all landladies would be sorry to lose a tenant who paid his rent and didn't make a row. Good-bye, Mrs. Jones.”

“Good-bye, sir,” returned Mrs. Jones cheerfully, “and a pleasant journey to you.”

It is a fact that she had no personal affection for her silent lodger, and was far from imagining that he

was appealing to her for an expression of any such sentiment. Yet that was what he had been appealing for to anybody and everybody (in a most unintelligible fashion, no doubt) all his life; and only two persons, Hope and Tristram, had responded in the smallest degree. He bade farewell to Gower Street without regret, and in the evening reached Farndon, whither the family had preceded him by a few days.

Hope, sitting at her writing-table by the window, saw him drive up and waved her hand to him, which friendly signal he acknowledged by a grave bow. After he had disappeared, she devoted several minutes to pitying poor Jacob and promising herself that his life should be made less dreary for him in the future than it had been in the past. She had not been displeased by the harsh things that he had said of her husband, because she had divined the attachment and the longing for forgiveness which had prompted them. Also she thought that, if she had been in Jacob's place, she would have been to the full as sore and angry as he. What worse fate, indeed, could befall any mortal than that of being sent to Coventry by Dick? However, she was too busy with a certain letter upon which she was just then engaged to bestow more than a commiserating thought or two upon Jacob Stiles.

"They talk of the middle of June for the wedding," she wrote, resuming her interrupted sentence; "but both of them say that they would rather put it off for some weeks than be married while you are away. I am sure you will not mind coming back a little sooner than you had intended, though Carry seems to think that you may. She is writing to you herself, and she tells me that there is no real necessity for your return—I

mean as regards drawing up settlements and all that—but she does very much wish you to be present; and so do I.” The last word was erased (not, however, in such a manner as to render it illegible), and “we all” substituted.

“Captain Cunningham came down yesterday,” the writer continued, “and will stay for some time, I suppose. I would not ask him before because of what you said about it; but I thought I might take it for granted that you would not disapprove of his being here now. He means to give up the army, I believe, and they are to live in Yorkshire. Carry says there will be so much to do in the way of alterations and additions to the house that they will want no other occupation for several years to come. They seem to be really fond of each other and are always talking over plans. Of course, though, I do not see much of them.”

The letter was continued in the same somewhat formal and laboured style for another half-page, and ended up with a polite hope that game had been plentiful and that English life would not be found very tame after the exciting experiences which were doubtless to be met with daily among the mountains of the far West. The fact was that Hope had not found the composition of this epistle by any means an easy task. She did not want to tell Dick how very eager she was to see him again; at the same time she was terribly afraid lest, in his easy-going, unconventional way, he should declare that his sister was old enough to take care of herself, and could get married without any need for his support. Then, too, it had been extremely difficult to write about Bertie Cunningham without

either saying what was untrue or what would have been better left unsaid; so that, upon the whole, the letter was not a success, and she knew that it was not, although she could not see her way to improving it.

In the absence of a request which Hope, after some vacillation, thought it wiser to withhold, Jacob did not appear at the dinner-table that evening; nor was he to be discovered in his studio when sought for the next day. It appeared, upon inquiry, that he had been seen to leave the house on foot at an early hour, and it was partly with the expectation of encountering him, partly in order to leave the entire house and garden at the disposal of the engaged couple, that Hope herself strolled across the park soon after breakfast, and made for the bare woodlands that overshadowed the lake. In that direction, as she knew, Jacob most commonly bent his steps, and it was among those trees that she had often come upon him, pacing slowly along, with his hands behind his back and his head sunk upon his breast, in gloomy meditation.

Her own meditations, that morning, were not quite as cheerful as they might have been. Having for some days past been buoying herself up with hopes that her troubles might be approaching an end, it was not surprising that she should now begin to experience a reaction, and should ask herself what real ground there was for supposing that the future would differ from the past. Why should it? There was a great deal of truth in what Jacob had said and implied about her husband. The distinctive feature of Dick's character was its unchangeableness. He had made up his mind to a marriage without love; he had weighed the advantages and disadvantages of such a union,

and would probably never have regretted entering upon it, had he not become convinced that his wife had fallen in love with Bertie Cunningham. Whether that conviction could now be removed, and whether, if it were removed, he would ever be anything more than a considerate friend to her, Hope felt to be doubtful. She could not help fearing that it was too late—that she had let her opportunity go by. In the early days of their married life she might possibly have made him love her; but now—? The wind, sweeping through the naked boughs and driving a few of last year's dead leaves before it, seemed to sigh "Too late!" Nature, as all the world knows, can be eloquent enough upon occasion; but those who wish to hear her true voice must approach her without pre-occupations of their own; and as this is not a common condition among mortals, Nature for most of us only acts the part of an echo or a mirror. Beneath Hope's feet early violets were peeping out here and there; above her head the buds were tipped with green; in the pale sunshine and the mild air there was promise of spring. These things ought to have suggested to her that sorrow is no more eternal than joy, that fair weather must follow rain, and summer winter; and that there is always a good time coming for those who have the patience to wait for it; but what they actually did suggest to her was that every dog has his day, that new years are for new people, and that the past never returns. Therefore she sighed as she went her way, and failing to discover Jacob Stiles (to whom she would have been glad to confide a measure of her forebodings, with a view to being contradicted), ended by turning round and heading for the house again.

Presently her ear caught the sound of an approaching footstep, then an abrupt bend in the path along which she was walking brought her face to face—not with Jacob Stiles, but with a far less welcome intruder upon her solitude.

“All by yourself, Captain Cunningham?” was her greeting, not very cordially spoken. “Where is Carry?”

“Writing letters indoors,” answered Bertie, throwing away the end of his cigar. “I saw you going off in this direction,” he added, “and it occurred to me that I would follow you.”

Hope looked as though she thought he might have had a happier inspiration. “I am going home now,” she remarked.

“Then, if you don’t mind, I’ll walk with you,” said Bertie.

To this she made no reply; so he turned and accompanied her for some little distance without opening his lips. “This is the first time that I have seen you alone since—since—last summer,” he observed at length.

“Yes,” she answered briefly.

“Mrs. Herbert—is it peace?”

She turned upon him with a quick, impatient frown. Why would he not consent to let well alone? It seemed to her that his question was in the worst conceivable taste; but it might be better to answer it, once for all. “Of course it is peace,” she said; “but please never refer to this again.”

“I promise you that I won’t after to-day,” he answered, with something of a sigh. And then: “I wonder what you think of me!”

Hope was upon the point of saying: “I don’t think

about you at all;" and this, no doubt, would have been the best and most conclusive answer to make. But remembering, somewhat unreasonably, that she was indebted to Bertie Cunningham for most, if not all, of the sorrows which had come upon her, she was constrained to reply: "I don't know why you should wish to hear my opinion of you. You must be curiously sanguine if you expect it to be a flattering one."

"But of course I don't expect that," said Bertie humbly; "all I wanted to know was whether it was so bad as to prevent the possibility of our ever being friends again."

"Well, since you ask me, I think it is. That is to say, if by friends you mean intimate friends. But perhaps you only mean that it would be very inconvenient for us to be enemies. There I quite agree with you; so you need feel no alarm on that score. When we meet, I shall not behave in such a way as to excite remark."

"In other words, I have forfeited your friendship for ever. I suppose I have no right to complain; but I must say that I think it a severe sentence. Perhaps it doesn't seem so to you, because you don't know how much I value your friendship. I should have thought you might have pardoned me now. Once—just for one moment—I lost my head and let out what I ought to have kept to myself. I was very sorry for it afterwards, and I told you so; and it is an offence which certainly can never be repeated. Whether I had any excuse or not——"

"There could be no excuse," broke in Hope. "If you want me to say that I forgive you, I will do so willingly; I could have said as much as that long ago.

But it is quite out of my power to think of you as I used to think."

"But why? You never thought too well of me; you knew I was no better than other fellows. I fancied that you knew even that—that——"

"Never!" exclaimed Hope. "I did not suspect you of it for one moment."

"You speak as though it had been a crime. How can one help—However, I won't risk offending you again. Only you might take into consideration the circumstance that it was I, not you, who suffered."

Hope stood still for a moment and stared at him. She forgot that, not being in possession of all the facts, he might hold such an opinion with sincerity; the depth of his selfishness seemed to her simply amazing.

"Do you really mean that?" she exclaimed. "Or do you say it merely because you have got into the habit of saying that kind of thing? In what way have you suffered? I, who was innocent, have had to suffer in a hundred ways; but you have never considered any one but yourself all along. A year ago, when we were so much together in London, you must have known perfectly well—though I did not—that I should be accused of flirting with you; you must have known that people like Lady Chatterton would put the worst construction upon what I only meant for friendliness; and I should think you must have guessed that impertinent things would be said to me about it. At all events, they *were* said. But that was nothing. It was horrid, and it made me miserable at the time; still it was nothing in comparison with what happened afterwards. Dick would never have gone away and left

me if you had not as you say 'lost your head' and spoken to me as you did; and if Dick and I remain estranged all our lives, it will be your doing. And then you pretend that you have not made me suffer!"

Bertie's eyes became very round and his jaw dropped slightly. What was even more startling than Hope's vehemence was the unexpected revelation of her love for her husband. That she actually was in love with her husband he could not doubt. A fact; but surely a most marvellous one!

"I—I'm awfully sorry," he stammered. "But don't you think you must be mistaken—I mean, about the reason of Herbert's going to America? It couldn't have been on account of *that*; for he never can have known of it."

"I told him of it," answered Hope quietly.

Bertie's eyes grew rounder than ever. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed; "you didn't do that!"

"Yes, I did. It was a foolish thing to do, perhaps—at any rate, you would consider it so—but I didn't choose to have any secrets from him. He was not surprised, nor particularly shocked; he knew exactly how it would end, and he told me that you would propose to Carry before long—just as you have done."

Bertie bit his lip. He walked on for some minutes in silence, and it may be assumed that his thoughts were not of the pleasantest nature. Hope, meanwhile, lagged behind and surreptitiously wiped away the tears which had risen into her eyes. Already she was a little ashamed of having displayed her feelings so openly; yet she was not sorry that Bertie should be made acquainted with the truth.

"But even if Herbert did know what I was going

to do so much better than I knew myself," he said, when she joined him again, "I don't quite understand why that should have made him leave the country."

"At any rate," she returned, "you must understand that our old friendship cannot very well be revived; but there is no use in talking about it any more. Let us drop the subject now. Whatever my future may be, you may be sure that I shall not trouble you with any more reproaches."

"But indeed," exclaimed Bertie eagerly, "it isn't so bad as you think. I'll speak to Herbert as soon as he comes back—that much, at least, I can do in the way of reparation. There is still time to correct a mistake, and I don't see what should prevent your future from being happy. Herbert will be back in a couple of months, I suppose, or sooner; and——Hullo, Stiles! where on earth did you drop from? I wish you wouldn't make a man jump out of his skin in that way!"

"I beg your pardon," said the subject of this apostrophe, who had bounded into the path from above, without any warning; "I missed my footing and came down the bank more quickly than I intended."

Perhaps it was the velocity of his descent that made him so pale. He took off his hat to Hope, but avoided looking at her; and a rather awkward pause ensued. Bertie was disconcerted and angry, fearing that his last words had been overheard, and suspecting Jacob of having played the eavesdropper. Jacob himself, standing in the middle of the path with downcast eyes, neither moved nor spoke. He seemed to be hardly conscious of where he was; and it was only

when Hope said: "We are going homewards; will you come with us?" that he started and roused himself.

"I—no, thank you—I will walk a little farther, I think," he replied hurriedly: and, with another bow, he plunged into the undergrowth and was soon out of sight.

It must be confessed that Bertie's suspicions were not wholly unfounded. A gentleman, as every one will agree, is incapable of acting the part of a spy; but poor Jacob Stiles, who was not a gentleman, may have been slightly deficient in respect of delicate points of honour and may have drawn distinctions between deliberate *espionnage* and mere casual use of the senses with which Nature had endowed him. Such distinctions ought not to be drawn; and Jacob was punished for his casuistry by seeing and hearing too much and too little. Wandering through the woods, with no worse intention than to seek relief for a troubled mind, he had discerned the two persons about whom his mind was chiefly troubled progressing slowly, side by side, at a somewhat lower level, and had paused for a moment to watch them. Then, when he had seen Hope take out her handkerchief and raise it to her eyes, the temptation to approach them stealthily had been irresistible, and he had yielded to it. Thus he had come within earshot just in time to hear Captain Cunningham declare that a mistake might yet be corrected and that Hope's future might be happy. Also that Herbert would not be home for another two months. It was at this particularly unlucky juncture that Jacob's foot slipped and that he interrupted the colloquy, as above related. From what had reached his ears he could deduce but one inference; and that it was not

of a very agreeable kind was shown by the frown which contracted his brow, as he brushed through the thickets, and the look of set determination which gradually fixed itself about the corners of his mouth. He marched straight on, not noticing whither he was going, for a considerable time; but at length he came to a standstill, leant back against the trunk of a tree, folded his arms and gave a great sigh.

"Well," he exclaimed aloud, "I am glad the die is cast, anyhow! It is something to have finished with doubt. The thing must be done, and I must do it—no escape now!"

All of a sudden a violent fit of trembling seized upon him and he sank down upon the ground, dropping his head upon his hands. The attack, whatever it was, only lasted a few minutes. He raised his head by and by, and looked about him, frowning, like a man who has just awoke from sleep. "What is the meaning of this? Am I a coward, in addition to my other virtues?" he muttered, with a sneer. "No, I don't think I am that, I never was considered so. After all, I always knew it would come to this. If only I am not too late to save her! But I won't think of that—I won't think of anything! The time for thinking has gone by."

Nevertheless he remained where he was, lost in thought, for another half-hour; and when at last he rose and walked away, his face had the haggard, drawn look of one who is still passing through a severe mental conflict.

CHAPTER XVII.

JACOB UNDER A NEW ASPECT.

"I HEAR," said Carry, while she and Hope were sitting together, late in the afternoon, with the tea-table between them, "that Stiles is somewhere about the premises. Wouldn't it be as well to ask him to dine with us?"

Hope raised her eyebrows. "I should be delighted to have him at dinner," she answered; "but I thought you objected so strongly to his being received in this way."

"I certainly did, once upon a time; but a good many changes have taken place since then. To begin with, I am no longer mistress of the establishment, and I can't be held responsible for what goes on in it. Secondly, Stiles has made a position for himself which entitles him to be received, and to be called 'Mr. Stiles,' if you and he wish it. Thirdly, you like talking to him. Fourthly and finally, a triangular conversation is the greatest bore in the world."

Probably the last reason assigned by Miss Herbert was, in her eyes, the most cogent; but she was also willing to show Hope a pleasure, feeling that she had obligations in that quarter. "I don't like Stiles," she went on meditatively; "I have always thought, and I think still, that there is something about his face which suggests the treadmill, and I have every reason to believe that he hates me like poison. Nevertheless, I suppose he ought hardly to be treated as a dependent

any longer. We might have him down to-night, and see how he behaves himself. If the experiment doesn't succeed, we needn't repeat it."

"I will ask him then," said Hope, smiling; "and I think I can answer for his behaving properly, if he comes. But I am pretty sure that he won't come."

"I am quite ready to stake half-a-crown against a sixpence that he does," rejoined Carry calmly. And she would have been a sixpence the richer if her bet had been accepted; for, rather to Hope's surprise, the footman who was sent up to Jacob's studio with a note, returned promptly to say that Mr. Stiles "desired his compliments and would have much pleasure."

Everybody noticed that there was something odd about Jacob Stiles when he made his appearance in the drawing-room that evening, just after the dinner-bell rang. He was not at all like himself, and certainly he was most unlike the wan, despairing-looking man who had issued from the woods a few hours before. His eyes were bright; his cheeks, for once, had a tinge of colour in them; he entered the room with a smile upon his face, and carried his chin quite a couple of inches higher than usual. Without waiting to be addressed, he began talking to Hope in an easy, conventional fashion, just as if he had been an ordinary guest, and as if his presence had not signified the breaking down of a long-established barrier. "We have made a mistake," whispered Carry to Bertie. "He thinks he has got the recognition that he has been trying for all his life, and he will proceed to give himself insufferable airs upon the strength of it."

But he did nothing of the kind. To whatever cause the change in his demeanour may have been

due, it was not a change to which any exception could be taken. In the last chapter, it was remarked that he was not a gentleman; but that, as to externals, he could assume all the semblance of a gentleman, and even of a very agreeable one, was made apparent before he had been seated five minutes at the dinner-table. Without putting himself forward in any way, he contrived not only to talk rather more than his neighbours, but to show them that he was both cleverer, and better informed than they. Upon every subject that chanced to come up he had something bright and original to say, and said it quite spontaneously. He was perfectly at his ease, and, one would have thought, perfectly natural; only that it was difficult for those who knew him to believe that in all their previous intercourse with him he had been acting a part. If this was the real Jacob, for what imaginable reason had he concealed his identity so long and under so repellent a disguise? Hope, though pleased to see her *protégé* distinguishing himself, could not make him out at all; and Carry, after one or two attempts to snub him, which were foiled by his courtesy and determination not to see what she meant, fairly hauled down her colours, and admitted to herself that she had formed a mistaken estimate of his character and capacities. As for Bertie Cunningham, to whom Jacob did not address much of his conversation, he took note of the brightness of his opposite neighbour's eyes, and came to the uncharitable conclusion that Stiles had been having a pretty stiff brandy-and-soda upstairs.

However that might be, Jacob did not seem disposed to indulge in deep potations after the ladies

had left the dining-room. He fidgeted about, and replied irrelevantly to the languid remarks which Bertie made between the whiffs of his cigarette, until the latter, perceiving his impatience, said: "Well, if you won't take any more wine, I suppose we may as well make a move. You are coming to the drawing-room, aren't you?"

Jacob nodded. "I was invited to spend the evening," he answered, with a slight smile.

A few minutes later he had seated himself beside Carry, and had engaged her in a discussion upon the best way of taming vicious young horses, he himself being for gentleness and patience, while she was in favour of more vigorous methods of repression. He professed to be convinced by some of her arguments, and mixed a good deal of adroit flattery with his own observations; so that the dialogue was maintained with great spirit for a good quarter of an hour. This was all very well; but Miss Herbert ended by remembering that it was not in order to entertain her that Jacob had been dragged from his solitude, and as he remained impervious to a few civil hints, she rose unceremoniously and, crossing the room to the fireplace, in front of which Bertie was standing, said: "Come and have a game of billiards. Then you will be able to smoke."

"All right," answered Bertie, who, for his part, had found some difficulty in keeping up a flow of small-talk with Hope. And so the two left the room together.

Hope, who was sitting by the fire, did not move; and as soon as the door had closed, Jacob dropped into an arm-chair opposite hers. "I thought, if I could

show myself sufficiently attentive to Miss Herbert, I should drive her away," he remarked, with a low laugh. "Now we can talk."

Hope looked a little surprised; she was not accustomed to hearing Jacob adopt that kind of tone. "What is the matter with you to-night?" she asked, her curiosity getting the better of her manners. "Do you know that you are hardly recognisable?"

Jacob laughed again. "I am in high spirits, Mrs. Herbert," he answered, "that is all. You never saw me in high spirits before, and no wonder you don't recognise me. I hope I haven't been obtrusive or impertinent. The fact is that I have been trying all the evening to forget who and what I am. Have I succeeded too well?"

"You have succeeded in being very pleasant and amusing," replied Hope, "and I am glad you are in high spirits. But what has happened to make you so?"

"I wonder," said Jacob, "whether you ever experienced the delight of coming to the end of a thing. When I have finished a picture I am always glad. It may have been my chief occupation and my only pleasure for months; I may have enjoyed working at it, and learnt to look upon it almost as a living thing, and a faithful friend; yet, when the last touch has been put to it, I throw down my brushes, and rejoice. I have done with it; it is off my mind, and I am free again. Not really free, of course; because as soon as I have finished one picture, I begin another, and have to decide upon the subject too, which is always a painful process. Still I rejoice. I suppose we are all under the impression that we have a certain amount of work to accomplish in the world, and that the more we

get done the less there remains to do. I could understand that, at the end of all, an old man might lie down to die with a feeling of intense relief and gratitude. Though, to be sure, I don't remember ever hearing of such a case."

"Life is sweet," said Hope, not quite following him.

"To some people, no doubt; but we all cling to it, whether it is sweet or not. My life, hitherto, has been almost entirely bitter; and no one can be surprised that I should be in high spirits now that I have reached the last page of the last chapter of it."

"Of your life?"

"Well, of my past and present life."

"What are you going to do?" asked Hope wonderingly.

"Oh, nothing very startling; only I am going to leave Farndon. Don't think me ungrateful, Mrs. Herbert, and don't imagine that I shall ever to my dying day forget all your kindness to me. But I can make my own living now, and I ought not to remain in this house either as a guest or as a pensioner. I have been thinking for a long time of breaking off with the old life and beginning a new one, and I want to travel about for a little before settling down in a home of my own. I spoke to you about it in London, you know."

"You said in London that you were in no hurry," observed Hope, who was not quite pleased at Jacob's eagerness to depart. Up to that moment he had always been her devoted slave, treating every wish of hers as law; but now, without any visible reason, lo and behold, her slave was ostentatiously declaring his independence! Such declarations are never agreeable

to any woman, and the present one was not agreeable to Hope. "Of course," she added, "if you are so very anxious to start, I wouldn't for the world detain you; but I am sorry you should have changed your mind already."

"I haven't changed my mind, Mrs. Herbert; I have only made it up. What I told you, if you remember, was that I was uncertain whether I would go abroad at all. Now I have decided to go; and when one has decided to do anything, the sooner one does it the better."

"Perhaps so," answered Hope, a little coldly. "And when do you start?"

"I must be off to-morrow morning. I telegraphed this afternoon to ask if there was a vacant berth on board the steamer, and it seems that there is. If I don't take it I may have to wait some time."

"What steamer are you speaking of?"

"Oh, I forgot to say that I am going to America. I have always had a great wish to see the Western States and the Rocky Mountains, and perhaps California. It was a choice between that and the picture-galleries of Europe, and, all things considered, I thought I would give the precedence to Nature."

"The Rocky Mountains!" exclaimed Hope. "Then perhaps you will meet Dick."

Jacob smiled. "That is possible, of course," he answered; "whether it is likely is another question. The Rocky Mountains, as you know, extend over the entire length of the North American continent. Besides, Mr. Herbert will be starting to return home by the time that I get out there, will he not?"

"Yes, perhaps; but I hardly think he will be able

to leave the moment that he gets my letter; nor can I tell you exactly where he is. Latterly I have been writing to him at the Post-Office, Virginia City, Montana."

Jacob nodded silently. Presently he resumed: "I may find myself in Mr. Herbert's neighbourhood or I may not. But, after what I told you the other day, you will understand that it cannot be precisely an object with me to seek him out."

"You told me the other day that you had no affection for him," answered Hope; "but I don't think that was quite the truth. I think what you meant was that you were hurt and angry with him; and I don't say that you have no reason to be. But unless you had some affection for him you would not be angry, would you?"

Jacob's brow clouded over. "You are wrong," he returned almost roughly; "I have no such feeling as you imagine—nothing of the kind. Just consider what he has done to earn my affection. It is so easy for a rich man to lay a pauper under an eternal obligation! A careless sort of good-nature, which cost him nothing, made him adopt me when I was an orphan; he brought me up—not very judiciously, perhaps—like a gentleman, and I used to be found an amusing little fellow by him and his friends. Then I deceived and disappointed him, and at once he turned his back upon me. He had taken me out of my own class; he didn't think me worthy to be received into his. All my life I have been neither fish, flesh, nor good red-herring; and my life, as I was saying just now, has been full of bitterness. No! I have no affection for Mr. Herbert; and I will go further than that and add that I don't

think he has deserved any affection from me. But we have already said all that there is to be said upon this subject. Can we not find something pleasanter to talk about on my last evening?"

Hope did not respond immediately. In her heart of hearts she thought Jacob a little ungrateful—certainly to Dick, perhaps also to herself. But her displeasure did not hold out long against his resolution to enjoy himself for once, and for once to meet those about him upon a footing of equality. With a good deal of tact he drew her thoughts away from the present and led her to speak of the past—of her life at Helston Abbey with her father, of her artistic aspirations, and of other topics with which neither Dick Herbert nor Bertie Cunningham were in any way connected. At first the burden of keeping up the conversation rested upon his shoulders; but insensibly he shifted it to those of his companion, and, leaning back in his chair, with one hand shading his eyes, watched her intently and silently, while she chatted on about this and that. When the engaged couple returned from the billiard-room Hope was astonished—and said so—to see that it was already past eleven o'clock.

"I am glad," observed Jacob with a smile, "that I have not been a bore." And then, turning to Carry: "I shall not be in danger of boring anybody at Farn-don again for some time to come. I have just been telling Mrs. Herbert that I start for America to-morrow."

"Really?" said Carry, indifferently. Then, with a slight accession of interest: "To what part of America do you propose to go?"

"To the extreme West—the Yellowstone Park and that region, perhaps."

Carry looked rather hard at him. This sudden resolution to proceed to the remote quarter of the globe in which her brother was sojourning struck her as an odd coincidence—if it was a coincidence. "Oh, to that region. And why to that region in particular?" she asked: which, as it happened, was just what Jacob wanted her to ask.

"An artist's whim," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "I am told that the scenery of the Rocky Mountains is disappointing, from an artistic point of view, owing to the gigantic scale of everything which shuts out all effects of contrast, and the clearness of the atmosphere which makes distant outlines too distinct; and indeed one doesn't hear of any Rocky Mountain pictures, except Bierstadt's. However, I can but try."

"I thought landscape was not your line," said Carry, still vaguely suspicious.

"It has not been hitherto; but I am going to make a change—in that and in other things. I have worked hard in one groove for a good many years, and I think I am fairly entitled to a change. I ought to be packing up my possessions now. Good-night, Miss Herbert, and good-bye, if I don't see you again."

He shook hands with her and with Cunningham, but when he approached Hope, with a similar intention, she said: "No; I must see you before you start in the morning. Perhaps I may intrust you with some message for Dick, in case you meet him."

"I shall be delighted to execute any commission, Mrs. Herbert," answered Jacob; "but you had better

not commit anything of importance to me; because, as I told you just now, the chances are very much against my meeting him." And thereupon he withdrew.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN VIRGINIA CITY.

It is quite possible that Virginia City, which made an ambitious start in the world as capital of the territory of Montana, but has since lost that proud distinction, might eventually have grown into a city, if events had proved favourable to its development; that is to say, if the mineral district in the midst of which it is situated had turned out as rich as it once promised to be. But mines (as many people on both sides of the Atlantic know to their sorrow) have a deplorable habit of leaving promises unfulfilled; and so, when the weary traveller makes his way into Virginia City, he is apt to think that the persons who bestowed so high-sounding a title upon a mere handful of small habitations were taking time by the forelock in a somewhat unjustifiable manner. Such, at any rate, was the opinion of two bearded, weatherbeaten, and dilapidated sportsmen who arrived there one afternoon in the month of April. They were standing disconsolately at the window of the inn where they had taken up their quarters, and were watching the first flakes of the coming snowstorm, which a furious wind was driving before it.

"Did you ever in all your born days see such a place!" muttered one of them.

"Most certainly I never did," replied his companion, with conviction; "and I humbly hope that I may never see such another. Indeed, if you come to that, I am quite sure that I never shall, because I shall not be found in this country again. I don't want to grumble; I believe I may claim to have abstained from grumbling pretty creditably for the last two months; but I will go so far as to state my deliberate opinion that this is an overrated country. The climate is beastly——"

"No, not the climate," interrupted the first speaker; "I don't complain of that."

"I do, then; I complain of it bitterly; and I stick to what I have said. A climate in which you are liable to be buried in snow in the month of April is a beastly climate. But of course one could put up with that, if there were compensations. What I want to know is, where are the compensations? Where are the bighorn? Where are the moose, and the elk, and the antelope? Answer me that, Herbert, if you can."

"My dear fellow, if I could," answered Dick, with a placidity which was only superficial, "I should not be contemplating this caricature of a city at the present moment. But I know where the whisky is—and I'm going to drink it. It seems the only thing to be done."

Francis sighed heavily. "What I should consider a piece of real good luck," he remarked, "would be if either you or I were to receive a letter, necessitating our immediate return to England. But of course nothing of the kind will occur. It is only when one is having a good time that one is certain to be summoned away at a moment's notice, and we have emphatically *not* been having a good time of it lately.

Moreover, I don't believe there's a good time coming, do you?"

Dick shook his head. "Not in these parts, I'm afraid; but we may do better by moving south a bit. What a time that fellow is bringing the letters!"

The true sportsman, it is said, always accepts bad luck philosophically; but presumably there are limits to the endurance even of the true sportsman. Our two friends, who could stand discomfort and disappointment better than most men, had reached the end of their stock of patience a few days before, and had determined to make for the comparative civilisation of Virginia City. They had been unfortunate all the winter through, killing very little game and encountering unusually severe weather. What had secretly vexed them both was their knowledge that they might have met with much greater success if they had been willing to cut themselves off from communication with the outer world for a few months; but Dick had not been able to make up his mind to this sacrifice, and although his companion had hitherto been too generous to remind him of the fact, he was painfully aware that their failure was his fault.

"After all," he said apologetically, "we have sent home a fairish number of heads and skins."

"Quite so; but when did we send the last? Don't you think it is getting very nearly time to take home our own heads and skins? I only throw it out as a suggestion, you know; I said I would see you through, and I will. But haven't we—ahem!—attained our object by this time?"

Dick stretched out his long legs and contemplated

the heavy boots which adorned them. "I don't know," he said, after a pause.

The two men had been together morning, noon, and night, for three-quarters of a year; but although they were such old friends—perhaps because they were such old friends—not a word had passed between them as to the true cause of their absence from England. Francis relapsed into silence; and presently an agreeable diversion was created by the entrance of Dick's servant, with his arms full of newspapers and letters, which he cast in a heap upon the table.

Dick jumped up with some alacrity and drew towards him his share of the spoil, singling out one letter from the rest, which he looked at for a moment and then laid aside upon the mantelshelf, to be perused when the others should have been run through. Francis, watching him out of the corner of his eye, noticed this performance and smiled slightly to himself. He was quite accustomed to it, having seen it take place many times before—as often, indeed, as the post came in. His own correspondence, which did not happen to be interesting, was soon disposed of, and he fell back upon the newspapers, while Dick read and re-read the letter which he had reserved for the last, not raising his eyes from it until dinner was brought in. During that repast he was more than usually taciturn, and it was only after the bear and antelope meat had been done full justice to and pipes had been lighted that he said: "Well, Francis, you've got your wish. It's a case of making tracks for home before long, I believe."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Francis piously. "May I be permitted to inquire what's up?"

"Well, my sister Carry is going to be married; and

it seems to be considered that I ought to be present at the ceremony."

"I am delighted to hear it. I congratulate Miss Herbert; I congratulate myself; I congratulate everybody all round. Pass me the whisky and we'll drink everybody's health, except the health of the people who told us that bighorn abounded in the neighbourhood of Fort Ellis. By the way, who is the happy man?"

"Cunningham," answered Dick briefly.

"Oh-h-h!" ejaculated Francis, setting down his glass, while he involuntarily pursed up his lips, as if about to whistle.

"You seem surprised," observed Dick.

"Eh? Surprised? Oh dear, no! not in the least," returned Francis hastily. "I always expected it to be a match. Didn't you?"

"Yes; I certainly did," said Dick. "I am not surprised; but I think you are, and I think I know why you are. Look here, Francis, I've a great mind to make a clean breast of it, and—er—well, ask you for your advice. Of course I don't mean to say that I shall take your advice. I've been upon the point of speaking to you half a hundred times before; but I'm such a confoundedly reticent beggar, and I do so hate talking about my private affairs! As a general thing, every man is the best judge of his own business; only I suppose everybody feels the need of consulting a friend now and then."

Francis nodded, knowing his man and being aware that protestations of friendship on his part would be both superfluous and unwelcome.

"But first of all," Dick went on, "should you say

that I was bound to be in England for Carry's wedding? I mean, if my presence were undesirable on other grounds, would that be a good enough reason for my returning?"

"I should say that you were most undoubtedly bound to be there. Also that your presence would be desirable upon other grounds," replied Francis succinctly.

"H'm! Well, I am inclined to agree with you—at least, as to my being at the wedding. I could always go away again afterwards if——"

"If you wanted to go?"

"Yes; or if others wanted me to go. You disapproved of my marriage from the first, didn't you, Francis?"

"Disapproved isn't exactly the word to use: I had no business to disapprove. I was afraid it was rather a—what shall I say?—rather a hazardous experiment."

"I know. You were perfectly right, it *was* a hazardous experiment, and I need hardly tell you that it has turned out a failure. You must have seen that for yourself?"

Francis admitted that he had conjectured as much.

"I suppose it was bound to be a failure," Dick went on; "but she has more right to complain than I have, because I am sorry to say that I wasn't quite candid with her at starting. Generally, as you may have noticed, I am rather particularly candid. All my life I have gone in for telling the literal truth, and maybe I have prided myself a little upon sticking to that plan. Anyhow I never tried another until I proposed to Hope Lefroy. I don't think you ever saw her until

after our engagement; but most likely you know what her circumstances were when her father died."

Francis signified assent. "It was a very hard case," he remarked.

"Terrible; I don't know that I ever heard of a worse. Brought up with every imaginable luxury, you know, and taught to believe that she was a great heiress, and then suddenly thrown upon the world, with no more money of her own than would pay for her clothes. I must say for Lefroy that he did his best to be kind to her; he couldn't well do more than offer her a home. But she was a great deal too proud to live upon charity, and nothing would satisfy her but that she should become a professional artist and support herself. Now, it was as certain as anything could be that she would fail at that, and it seemed to me tolerably certain, too, that in the course of a year or so she would be driven into marrying one of the rich men whom Lady Jane would take care to place at her disposal—and who might very likely be a ruffian."

"And so, to save her from a worse fate, you proposed to her yourself."

"And so I proposed to her—yes. We were very good friends, and I put it to her whether we might not live together permanently as good friends. I said we wouldn't talk about love or anything of that sort, but that in my opinion two people could be very happy as husband and wife without it. Each of us would allow the other plenty of liberty; we shouldn't be very much together; and as we should have a clear mutual understanding at the outset, there ought not to be much danger of our quarrelling."

"Whatever objections that declaration may have

been open to, it doesn't seem to me that lack of candour was one of them," remarked Francis.

"That is just where you make a mistake. If I had been candid, I should have told her that I adored her. I fell in love with her the very first time that we met; I tried to get over it but I couldn't; and, what is more, I never shall get over it as long as I live. Now you may laugh, if you like."

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Francis. "The only thing that I can't understand is why in the world you didn't tell her that you adored her."

"I should have thought a clever fellow like you might have guessed. It wasn't to be supposed that she could be in love with me, a man of nearly twice her age, with a figurehead on his shoulders which never was much to look at, and which is considerably the worse for wear now."

"What rubbish—as though that had anything to do with it!"

"No, it isn't rubbish; and when you fall in love with a girl of nineteen you will know that it isn't. My dear Francis, if such a thing were to happen to you to-morrow, I can assure you that—little as you may suppose it—you would immediately begin to study your face in the glass, and you would be simply horrified at your own reflection. You don't mind my saying so, do you?"

"Not being in love at present, I don't. Well, what reply did you get to those well-chosen words of yours?"

Dick sighed. "There was a good deal of doubt, and a good deal of delay," he answered, "but in the end she accepted me. At first she was inclined to suspect that I had proposed to her out of pity, and

as I couldn't tell her the real state of the case (because if I had she would undoubtedly have rejected me), I had trouble enough to invent plausible motives. There's no end to the difficulties that a man finds himself in when once he has departed from the truth! However we were married, and for the first month or more everything seemed to be going as smoothly as possible. The notion that I had taken into my head—I daresay it was an absurd one—was that she might come to love me in time. That is if I didn't bore her, and if I tried my best to make her happy, you understand. One has heard of such things happening in the case of women. For a man to marry without being in love, and to fall in love with his wife afterwards, would be impossible, as we know; the very idea is preposterous. But there is a general impression that women are differently constituted. Well, to cut a long story short, my plan didn't work. Having that secret from her put me rather at a disadvantage, I fancy. I don't think I can have bored her personally, for I kept myself in the background as much as possible, and left her alone whenever I could; but I am afraid she found life at Farndon rather a bore."

"In spite of your delicacy?" said Francis, who could not help laughing a little at this. "I beg your pardon, Herbert, but yours was the funniest way of making love that I ever heard of."

"Most likely it wasn't a very good way," agreed Dick humbly; "but it doesn't much signify whether it was good or bad, because in due course of time she—— Upon my word I don't quite like saying this even to you, Francis."

"You need not say it, unless you like, old man,"

answered Francis quietly; "I know what you mean. In due course of time she met somebody who—well, who didn't recommend himself to her notice by remaining in the background."

"Yes—Cunningham. After all, it's best to call things and people by their names."

"I won't deny," said Francis, "that I thought him dangerous at one time; everybody who saw them together thought so. But nothing is more common than for everybody to be mistaken, and before we left England I had begun to suspect there was a mistake in that instance. At all events, Cunningham's engagement to your sister seems to prove that there was."

"No, not exactly; Cunningham is a very good fellow in his way; but fidelity isn't his strong point, and he has been practically engaged to Carry in an off-and-on sort of fashion for a long time. That neither prevented him from falling in love with my wife, nor from declaring his love to her."

"You can't be sure that he declared it."

"Yes, I am; because she told me that he had."

"The deuce she did!" ejaculated Francis. "And after that, you call Cunningham a good fellow!"

"I said 'in his way'; it's a common enough way in these days, by all accounts. He is the kind of man who couldn't be in love with my wife, or anybody's wife, without letting her know of it."

"And she actually told you that he had done so!"

"Does that astonish you? It didn't astonish me. Hope is as honourable as you or I; and though I don't know that she was absolutely bound to tell me what had happened, I think she would have been sailing rather near the wind if she had concealed it. At any

rate, she did tell me; and I could see, by the state of agitation that she was in, that she cared for the man."

"Having convinced yourself of which, you thought it sensible and appropriate to betake yourself to the other side of the Atlantic!" exclaimed Francis, lifting up his hands.

Dick looked a little displeased. "I thought it sensible that, after such a discovery, we should remain apart for a time," he answered gravely, "and I still think so. You don't, I hope, mean to imply that I risked anything by turning my back upon England. What had happened was a misfortune for my wife and for me; but it was no more her fault than mine, and I can answer for it that if she has spoken to Cunningham since that day, it has not been willingly."

Francis held his peace, being in fact unable to make the response which his friend evidently expected of him; but when Dick added: "Well, now that you know all about it, tell me honestly what you think I had better do?" he answered:

"That is not a question which need puzzle anybody. Hitherto you seem to have consistently done what you ought not to have done, and left undone what you ought to have done. Your only course now is to go home as quickly as you can, and begin all over again."

Dick shook his head. "It is too soon for that, I am afraid."

"A great deal more likely to be too late!" thought the other; but he said aloud: "I think you were in rather a hurry to jump to conclusions about Mrs. Herbert and Cunningham. What her feelings towards you may be I don't pretend to know; by your own

account, you made it impossible for her to show them. But I can say, from my own observation, that she was very much distressed at your leaving her."

"That is true," observed Dick, stroking his chin meditatively; "but I shouldn't be disposed to build too much upon that. It was only natural that just at first she should dislike the idea of being left alone. There was something in the letter that I had from her just now which I was rather glad to see," he added presently; "though probably it means nothing. You see, she says that Carry wants me to go home for the wedding, and then she has written 'and so do I,' and has scratched the words out afterwards."

He handed the open sheet to Francis, who glanced at it with an amused smile, and remarked: "The words aren't so very much scratched out, are they?"

"Do you think she meant me to read them then?" asked Dick eagerly.

"I think she must have been aware that you couldn't possibly help reading them. Give me a telegraph-form, and I'll secure our passage for Europe; this shoot is at an end."

Dick knocked the ashes out of his pipe, rose from his chair, and strode up and down the room three or four times. "No," he said decisively at last; "I had better not make my appearance until just before the wedding. I doubt whether there is any chance for me; but if there is, it will be improved by our having the house to ourselves. Now that Carry is going to leave us, I don't mind telling you that she hasn't been altogether an addition to our comfort. She means well; but—not to mince matters—she is most confoundedly in the way. Added to which, she naturally

looks upon me as being rather beyond the age for making love, and—and—in short, I daresay you can understand.”

“Do you mean that you are shy of your own sister?” asked Francis, laughing.

“That is precisely what I do mean. So, if you think you can stand a few more weeks of camping out, we’ll be off to Denver to-morrow, and then make for Estes Park. If we don’t get as many black-tail deer as we can shoot there, I’ll give you leave to say anything you like about the nakedness of the land.”

Francis, after some demur, acquiesced in this arrangement, and the same evening Dick despatched a lengthy telegram to Hope, informing her of his proposed change of quarters, and promising to be in England early in the month of June.

As events proved, it was an unfortunate decision; but the events in question not being of those which cast their shadows before them, nobody was to blame for it.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LONG JOURNEY.

"Do you know," asked Jacob Stiles, looking dreamily about him, "when I last breakfasted in this room?"

"No," answered Hope, who was the only other occupant of the dining-room at Farndon; "was it a long time ago?"

"It was on the morning of—the catastrophe of which I told you; from that day I began to live apart. And now here I am once more—only for once, though—and you have got up early to pour out my coffee for me. You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Herbert—sometimes I wonder why. But I suppose you are kind to everybody."

"Not to people whom I dislike," answered Hope, smiling. "If you think it a wonderful piece of kindness on my part to have come downstairs half an hour before my usual time, you might show your appreciation of it by doing a little justice to your breakfast. You have eaten nothing."

"I am not hungry," answered Jacob. And then, with a recurrence of the hesitating manner which he had contrived so completely to throw off on the preceding evening: "Mrs. Herbert, would it be a great liberty if I asked you to give me one of your photographs? I wanted to ask you last night, but I hadn't the courage. Only afterwards I said to myself that perhaps you would not mind, because there are some

requests which are impertinent coming from equals, but not from inferiors."

"If this were not your last morning," answered Hope, "I should be very much inclined to refuse you for putting your request in such a disagreeable way. As it is, I will only make one small request on my own score, which is that when you come back you will give up calling me your superior. As soon as I can paint pictures like yours we will begin to talk about being equals; but not before. Now I will go and get you the photograph."

She brought it presently, and, with a few murmured words of thanks, he slipped it into his breast-pocket. Immediately afterwards the butler came in to announce that the dog-cart was waiting. It was to Hope that he imparted this information; it would have been beneath his dignity to address himself to Jacob Stiles.

"I must go," said Jacob, glancing at his watch. "You said last night that you might perhaps have some commission for me to execute."

"Yes," answered Hope; "but, on second thoughts, I will not trouble you. I have nothing particular to say, and if, by any chance, you should come across Dick, you will be able to tell him all about me—all that he cares to hear. I hope you will have a very pleasant trip and that the change will do you a great deal of good."

"Perhaps it will," answered Jacob. "Now good-bye, Mrs. Herbert. There is a great deal that I should like to say to you; but I should not say it well, and I have tried already to tell you how grateful I am to you, and—and—how much I wish for your happiness.

May I say that I think the future will bring you more happiness than the past has done?"

Hope took the hand that he extended to her and returned its slight pressure. She thought that she understood him (though she did not), and accepted his words as a good omen. When one is on the lookout for omens anything will serve. Jacob held her hand for an instant, and, without another word, left the room.

He hurried across the hall, clambered into the dog-cart, gathering up the reins, and drove at a brisk pace down the avenue. "Over—and well over!" was what he was thinking to himself. No one would have supposed, to look at him, that the thought of the brief leavetaking which he had just gone through had kept him awake all night, and that more than once during the hours of darkness he had doubted whether he would have the fortitude to face it. When he reached the turn in the drive he pulled up abruptly and looked back at the house.

"Forgotten anything?" asked the groom who was sitting beside him.

"No; I have forgotten nothing yet," he answered, and, with a shake of the reins, drove on.

The groom laughed at this absurd reply. "One would think you was going to lose your things further on," said he. "Allus thought you was a pretty good 'and at lookin' arter yerself too."

Like his fellow-servants, he seldom let slip an opportunity of being impertinent to Jacob, whose habit it was to leave impertinences unnoticed.

"James," said the latter presently, "it is as likely as not that you will never see me at Farndon again."

"What, have you made yer fortun' then?" asked the man jocosely.

"Yes, I have made my fortune; and Farndon has not been such a pleasant home to me that I should wish to return. You have all hated and despised me, haven't you?"

"Well, I dunno about that."

"Oh yes, you do know. After all, it was natural enough, I suppose. You are like a flock of sheep, all of you. You take your cue from the stud-groom; the footmen take their cue from the butler; the butler and the stud-groom take theirs from their master. Still, I wish, after I am gone, you would just ask yourself what I have done to you to be hated and despised."

"I don't take my cue from nobody," returned James, remembering that he was a free-born Briton; "nor yet I don't hate no man, without he has give me good cause. But suppose you was to try workin' of it round t'other way, and arst yerself what you've done to make a man like yer?"

"That is a fair enough retort. Well, it is all over now, and it doesn't much signify. I suppose, James, you will admit that I can ride."

"Finest 'orseman I ever see in my life," answered James, with the air of one determined to give the devil his due.

"Remember me by that, then; and remember that you never knew me lose my temper with a horse. I have seen you bullying your horses more than once, James; and if it had been of the slightest use to speak to you about it, I should have spoken long ago. Depend upon it, no good was ever done in this world

by bullying. I know there are horses and boys who can stand a lot of flogging and be none the worse for it, though, of course, there are many who can't; but no horse should be thrashed without some reason that he can understand. He requires fair treatment, just as a man does, and unless he gets it he will turn nasty, just as a man will. When you have spoilt a horse's temper, you call him an incurably vicious brute; and when the same thing has been done to a man, he is called—what do you call me in the stables, James?"

"Never heerd you called out of yer proper name, as I can remember," answered the man in a somewhat surly voice, for he did not relish being lectured by Jacob Stiles.

"Have you not? But I am tolerably certain that no one about the place has a good word for me."

To this assertion, which had an interrogative ring, the stolid James vouchsafed neither assent nor contradiction. Jacob sighed, and then laughed.

"Here we are at the station," he said presently. "Good-bye, James; put that in your pocket, and bear in mind what I have said to you. It is true, and you may find it useful some day or other."

The eyes of James became round with amazement, and his tongue was paralysed; for it was nothing less than a five-pound note that Jacob had thrust into his hand. A donation so splendid, coming from such a quarter, made it impossible for him to express his feelings in words until he had handed the luggage out to the porter, and had turned his horse's head round. Then he slapped his leg with his open hand, and eja-

culated aloud: "I'm dashed if that feller ain't one o' the right sort, arter all!"

But the irony of the above encomium was lost to Jacob, who, by that time, had seated himself in an empty first-class carriage, and had entered upon a long soliloquy which, with occasional breaks, lasted him all the way to Liverpool.

"Five pounds to a groom! There's a sort of pleasure in being generous, even when generosity only takes the form of giving away what can never be of the slightest use to one's self any more. I wonder whether I should have been a great philanthropist if I had been a rich man—it isn't unlikely. I wonder what sort of person my father was. He hanged himself in a garret; and in about a fortnight's time from now——Heavens! how slowly this train moves; and they call it an express. And then the voyage! Ten mortal days and nights!—how shall I live through such an eternity?

"I think I have played my part well; they will all recollect that I set out in the best of spirits, and that I seemed to be looking forward to enjoying myself. When the news reaches her, she will not suspect that I have committed a crime for her sake. A chance encounter, a quarrel, probably a blow given and returned; it will be a nine days' wonder, and then it will be forgotten. The newspapers will be able to explain it all. 'The morbid and vindictive character of the criminal was well known to those who were brought into contact with him. That he cherished a secret grudge against his benefactor and victim seems to have been almost a matter of notoriety; and it is by no means improbable that constant brooding over his

imaginary wrongs may have unhinged his mind. Indeed, the absence of sufficient motive seems to point to the conclusion that the unfortunate gentleman whose death we have to record fell by the hand of a mad-man.' Am I mad? It is possible; but I can detect no symptoms of insanity in myself. I know very well what my purpose is, and what the consequences will be. I could abandon it now, if I chose; I am perfectly master of my own actions. And yet, is it really *I* who am going to do this horrible thing?

"What nonsense! There is nothing horrible in what I am going to do; I am not sure that there is anything wrong in it. What are right and wrong? Conventional terms, which mean very little more than expedient and inexpedient. A bad man is a man who makes himself obnoxious to his fellow-creatures. When he becomes too obnoxious to be tolerated any longer, the law stamps him out in one way or another. In this instance I, a private individual, am going to take the functions of the law upon me, for once. It is inexpedient that private individuals should behave in that way; but as for the moral guilt of the thing——

"For that matter, he deserves to die. If he were allowed to go on living, he would only live for himself, and make others unhappy; as far as I know what right is, I shall do right in killing him. Besides, I shall pay for his life with my own; so that we shall be quits. And, when all is said, what is the life of one man? Thousands and thousands are killed for the sake of adding a few square miles of territory to this or that country, and the men who order the slaughter, and the men who are sent to carry it out, are smothered in ribbons and rewards. The whole question of morals

is a question of inherited ideas and traditions. The morality of the Old Testament, for example, would soon bring anybody who practised it in our days to the gallows. Samuel hadn't the slightest compunction about killing his enemies in cold blood; nor had Elijah; and as for David, he was a murderer of a very much baser type than I shall be.

"No; it won't do. I can't deceive myself. A crime it is; and calling it by another name won't alter its nature. But right or wrong, crime or no crime, I will do it for her sake. Only I wish I had not such an interminable time to wait."

It was with reflections such as these, repeated again and again in different language, that Jacob's weary brain was occupied throughout his journey; but when he reached Liverpool, and when, shortly afterwards, he stood on the deck of the huge steamer that was to take him to New York, his mood suddenly changed. The prospect of the voyage came to him as a kind of respite; he determined that for the next ten days he would exist only in the present, putting away from him all thoughts of past and future alike; and, not a little to his own surprise, he found that he was able to do this without difficulty.

Those whose duties require them to keep up appearances and exhibit an unruffled countenance to the world, whatever may be their private griefs or anxieties (and there are many such persons in all classes), are aware how much simpler a matter than might be supposed it is to lead a double life. Outward show of emotion is banished because it must be banished, and soon the faculty is acquired of laying aside the emotion itself, with the show of it, to be resumed at leisure.

It is true that social intercourse is essential to the exercise of the above faculty; and it may have been because he was sensible of this that Jacob, in flagrant contradiction with his nature and habits, laid himself out to be agreeable to his fellow-passengers.

Before the ship had left the Mersey he had entered into conversation with several of these; to most, if not to all, of them he was already known as a talented artist, and his advances were so cordially responded to, that by the middle of the next day he found himself quite a popular personage. The sensation was a strange one to him, and he enjoyed it. Throughout the voyage, which chanced to be exceptionally calm, he maintained his novel character as a pleasant, companionable fellow, and contrived to merge his identity in his part as thoroughly as any actor who ever trod the boards. During the day he took part in all those varied devices for killing time which people are wont to employ on shipboard and to call amusements, for want of a better name; when he turned in at night he fell immediately into a heavy, dreamless sleep, which lasted until morning. Indeed, it may be said that he himself was asleep the whole time, or rather, that he was as nearly as can be realising the wish which most of us have felt—to be for a short period somebody else, to experience somebody else's sensations, and compare them with our own.

The real Jacob woke up one morning off Sandy Hook—woke with a shudder, but with no faltering in his purpose, nor any misgiving as to his power to carry it out. Among the acquaintances that he had made on board was that of an American who had recently visited the Yellowstone region, and to whom he had

imparted his intention of proceeding thither, in search of landscape studies. This gentleman, while warning him that he was making the trip far too early in the year, gave him information as to the best and quickest means of reaching his goal, and, on being given to understand that the artist had only a very limited space of time at his disposal, good-naturedly accompanied him to the train, gave him some hints for his future guidance, and saw him fairly off.

"Now, Mr. Stiles," he said at parting, "you will have to immortalise our National Park. I shall expect to hear of you again in connection with this trip, sir." To which Jacob replied quietly: "I think I may promise that you will."

But what a journey it was! Three interminable days and nights of it: days that seemed like weeks; nights of feverish, sleepless impatience, during which the wretched man feared more than once that his brain was giving way. The revolver which he had bought before leaving England hung at his belt; his fingers stole down to it again and again. Suicide, now that the crisis was so near at hand, seemed to be far easier than murder, and a voice kept whispering to him: "Die and have done with it! What difference will any one's happiness or unhappiness make to you when you are annihilated?" But he thrust the temptation away from him with a horror infinitely greater than any that the thought of his crime had aroused in him. Indeed, it was the persistency of it that made him think he must be losing his senses. "Whatever I may be, let me not be a coward!" he cried to himself in an inarticulate agony which was almost a prayer.

The scenery through which he passed did not in-

terest him in the least. From New York to Chicago by the Erie railway, and thence to St. Paul and Bozeman by the Northern Pacific line, had been the route marked out for him by his American friend. He noted the various stopping-places and checked them off mentally as so many links removed from the chain, but scarcely troubled himself to raise his heavy eyes and glance out of the window at city or country. When a man's feet are upon the steps of the scaffold, it matters little enough to him what kind of landscape may be surveyed from that eminence. At Bozeman Jacob quitted the train and reached Virginia City by stage, after a long and fatiguing drive over a very indifferent road, only to find that the party of which he was in quest had left some days before. The news gave him a momentary shock of intense disappointment, followed by a sensation of relief almost as intense. If Herbert's departure meant that he had started for England immediately after receiving his wife's letter, then Jacob's journey had been undertaken in vain. It was not at all likely that he would be able to overtake his victim on that side of the Atlantic, and to follow him to England and shoot him there would be impossible. The set purpose and premeditation of such an act would be too evident and would expose Hope to the feeling of remorse from which he was of all things most anxious to shield her. So that for a minute or two it almost seemed to him as if Providence or Fate had interposed to save Dick's life. But the first answers that he received to his questions sufficed to dispel that illusion, as well as to harden his heart against Herbert, who, it appeared, had no intention of giving up his sport to suit anybody's convenience. When Jacob heard that the two English-

men, with their retinue, had moved to Estes Park in the neighbourhood of Denver, he proposed to start in pursuit forthwith, and was only induced to take a night's rest when it was pointed out to him that he could by no possibility leave his present quarters until the following day.

It is needless to accompany him through the tedious and devious ways which brought him at length to the capital of Colorado. He had not doubted but that, on his arrival there, he would either fall in with Dick's party or learn whither it had proceeded; but it so chanced that the hotel which he selected was not the one at which his countrymen had put up, and the hotel clerk denied all knowledge of "the outfit" about which he inquired. Wandering down one of the broad streets in considerable perplexity—for he neither knew how to reach Estes Park nor felt sure that the information given him at Virginia City had been accurate—he heard his name called out in an unmistakably English voice, and, wheeling round, found himself face to face with Filmer, an old servant of Mr. Herbert's, and his attendant in many previous shooting expeditions to distant lands. This man—either owing to his firm conviction that whatever his master did was right, or because his own position was sufficiently secure to place him above all jealousy of upstarts—had always shown a more friendly disposition towards Jacob than the other servants at Farndon.

"What, Mr. Stiles!" exclaimed he. "Who would have thought of meeting you in this outlandish place! Nothing wrong at home, I hope?"

"Nothing at all," answered Jacob. "I have come out here to try and do some sketching in the moun-

tains, and I was rather in hopes that I might chance upon you all and get you to tell me where the best bits of scenery are."

"Lord bless your soul!" laughed Filmer, "you can't walk out here, with your sketch-book under your arm, as if you was in the Highlands of Scotland; nor yet you can't camp out all by yourself. I should say the best thing you could do would be to buy yourself a horse and come along with me to our camp. The governor and Mr. Francis went up there three days ago, and I'm to follow to-morrow with some mule-loads of baggage. I can find you a *broncho* easy enough. I don't say he won't be a buck-jumper; but that's all one to you."

After a moment of hesitation, Jacob decided to accept this offer. Absurd as such a scruple may seem to have been, under the circumstances, the idea of receiving hospitality and assistance from the man whose life he intended to cut short was repugnant to him. But as he could see no other way of effecting his purpose, he yielded to necessity, purchased one of the wiry little animals which were presently submitted to his inspection, and returned to his hotel to dinner. The next morning saw him starting on his sixty-mile ride, accompanied by Filmer and by a nondescript individual, hailing from Texas, who acted as guide and mule-driver.

"You don't look over and above well, Mr. Stiles," Filmer remarked, surveying him with a critical eye. "Been sticking to work in London too long, or what? Never mind; this fine air will make another man of you in no time."

"Do you think so?" Jacob answered absently.

The extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere, the warmth of the sun, the view of the glittering snowy range for which they were making, and the undulating grassy slopes in the foreground, studded over with endless varieties of wild flowers, failed to produce any effect upon him. Indeed, he was scarcely conscious of these things; only of a desperate eagerness to get to the end of what might probably be his last day on earth. Filmer related the events and adventures of the past winter; the mule-driver cursed his charges with ingenious elaboration of language; somehow or other the hours slipped away, while the air grew keener and the track steeper, until at length, just before sunset, a point was reached whence a couple of tents, standing upon the verge of the snow-fields which trended upwards towards Long's Peak, could be discerned.

As the cavalcade approached, a tall, bearded man emerged from one of the tents and gazed at it, shading his eyes with his hand. Jacob at the same moment recognised Dick Herbert and saw that he had himself been recognised. Dick strode forth to meet him, and, as soon as they were within earshot of one another, called out: "Jake, by all that's marvellous! Where in the world have you sprung from?"

Jacob stated his ostensible errand in a few words. His voice was steady; but his hands were so cold that Dick, when he grasped one of them, exclaimed: "Good Heavens, man, you're half-frozen! Come and warm yourself by the fire, and in a few minutes you shall have the best supper you ever sat down to in your life."

CHAPTER XX.

"FOR HER SAKE!"

It is necessary to spend many months far away from friends and fatherland to realise the pleasure of beholding a familiar home face unexpectedly. The face itself need not be that of a friend; it is for the sake of the associations connected with it, not for its own, that it is so welcome. Expatriated Parisians have been seen again and again to inhale with rapture the fumes of boiling asphalte, and it is a well-known fact that Scotchmen may be made to weep with joy by the sound of the bagpipes; an instrument which, one may venture to say, is not calculated to draw tears of that particular kind from the eyes of the profane vulgar. Thus Dick Herbert, who, when in England, took very little notice of Jacob (that being his customary method with persons whom he did not like), and Francis, who, without knowing much about the young artist, thought him an unattractive, sneaking sort of fellow, vied with one another in their attentions to him that night among the lonely Colorado mountains. For him the choicest morsels of venison were reserved; in his honour two bottles of champagne, out of a very limited stock, were uncorked; and when the meal was over, Dick handed him a cigar, with the regretful air of one who is parting with his ewe-lamb, and said: "There! it's the last but two of the English lot. I think I'll smoke a pipe myself."

Jacob neither did full justice to these luxuries nor

was he especially grateful for them. He understood very well to what he was indebted for so much civility; or at least he understood it so far as to be in no danger of mistaking it for a tribute of personal friendship. Sitting beside the camp-fire, beneath the twinkling stars, he answered briefly and somewhat abruptly the questions with which he was plied. Mrs. Herbert had been quite well when he had left; so had Miss Herbert; Captain Cunningham was staying in the house, and appeared to be in a fair way of recovery from his illness—and so forth. Hope's name was not mentioned more than once or twice, and after the first few minutes, Dick began to make inquiries about the horses and the family affairs of the tenantry and other subjects upon which Jacob was able to speak both with knowledge and with greater ease. Something polite was said about his own success, and hopes were expressed for its continuance which were more sincere than the subject of them chose to assume. It was not until Dick asked him pointblank what had put it into his head to come to Colorado, of all places, that he re-assembled his wits, remembering that he had still a part to play.

"Really," he answered, "I can hardly tell you. I was not very well in London; I thought I wanted a change, and nowadays one hears so much about the bracing air of these parts. Besides, I thought the landscapes upon the walls of the Royal Academy might be the better of a change too. We seem to have had just a little bit too much of Scotch moors and scenes on the Cornish coast and 'Back-waters on the Thames near Maidenhead.'"

"May I ask whether it was your intention to plunge

into the heart of the Rocky Mountains, unaided and alone?" inquired Francis. "If so, it seems to me that you were rather in luck when you chanced to strike our trail."

"Oh," answered Jacob, perceiving that he had overacted his part a little, "I thought it not unlikely that I might come across you somewhere, and I was sure that, if I did, you would be kind enough to give me a few hints and help me on my way."

"That showed a sanguine spirit on your part. Our being where we are is only the result of a sudden resolution and of the total disappearance of game from our winter-quarters. The week before last we were in the neighbourhood of Fort Ellis, something like five hundred miles away, as the crow flies."

"Mrs. Herbert told me that when she last heard from you you were near Virginia City," remarked Jacob, judging it best not to mention his abortive journey to that place; "but she seemed to be quite uncertain as to your future movements, so that there would have been very little use in my looking for you."

"You have found us, anyhow," said Dick; "and if you'll be advised by me, you will stay with us. We shall be here or hereabouts for another three weeks certain, and if you haven't had enough of wild life by that time, we must try and get you sent on to the Yellowstone Park, which you ought to see. But I doubt whether any of the hotels are open yet, and you certainly can't camp out all by yourself."

After this, conversation was kept up in a desultory fashion for another half-hour or so, when Francis, who had had a long day's work, said good-night and re-

tired, yawning, into his tent. The men, with the exception of Filmer, were already sound asleep.

"Well, Jake," said Dick, rising and stretching himself, "I think we may as well turn in now; we don't sit up late in this part of the world. Filmer, Mr. Stiles will share my tent; you have got a spare buffalo-robe for him, I suppose?"

He threw a few fresh logs on to the fire and turned away; but as he was stooping to enter his tent, Jacob touched him on the elbow and whispered: "I have something to say to you. Not now—we can't talk here, where every word may be overheard; but perhaps to-morrow morning you wouldn't mind riding or walking with me to some place where I could get a sketch. Of course I only suggest that as an excuse for getting rid of Mr. Francis and the others; it would be impossible for me to say what I want to say before them."

"H'm!" muttered Dick, "I meant to start the first thing in the morning after some black-tail that we saw to-day. Is your subject a pleasant or an unpleasant one, Jake?"

"It is not exactly pleasant."

"And won't it keep?"

"Yes; but it won't improve by keeping."

"I suppose not—unpleasant things seldom do. Very well, then, Francis shall do the shooting to-morrow, and I'll take you to a spot from which you will be able to see any amount of hills and valleys. You had better lie down and make yourself comfortable now, for you won't get much sleep after day-break, I can tell you."

Jacob stretched himself upon the couch of dried

grass which had been prepared for him; but for sleep he had neither inclination nor ability. The time had come, then, at last! In a few more hours both he and the man who was lying within reach of his arm, and whom it was impossible that he should survive, would have entered upon the sleep that knows no waking. It was a startling thought; yet not so startling as to make him waver for one instant in his resolution. He perceived with satisfaction, and even with a kind of pride, that his head was cool and his nerves steadier than they had been since his landing at New York. The only thing that troubled him was the treachery, the betrayal of hospitality which his scheme involved. He would much have preferred to meet Herbert in fair fight, had he been able to make sure of killing him in that way; but it would have been madness to dream of such an encounter; because it was essential that Herbert should die. "I am giving up my own life," Jacob thought; "I give it up willingly and gladly for her sake; but I won't give it up in vain—I won't give it up for anything less than the certainty of setting her free."

By degrees, while he lay there through the long night hours, listening to the sighing of the wind among the trees and watching the flickering shadows thrown upon the canvas by the flames of the fire outside, as they leaped and fell, the deed which he was about to commit seemed to him more and more like a righteous one, and he began to feel himself something of a hero. It is possible that he was indeed a hero of a kind; albeit a misguided one. Assuming that there are circumstances which may justify assassination (and that is an assumption which has never

lacked supporters) one must allow a measure of heroism to the assassin who sacrifices himself for absolutely unselfish ends. Whether this can be allowed to him in the absence of the supposed justifying circumstances is a question as to which opinion is likely to be divided. At any rate, Jacob, whose appreciation of himself with regard to the matter had fluctuated considerably, was able at this eleventh hour to find comfort in the contemplation of his disinterestedness.

"She will never know," he reflected. "I have taken every precaution, and the fact of their having moved here will be an additional argument against the theory of malice aforethought. A year hence, if she thinks about me at all, she will think of me with a shudder. An irreclaimable wretch; a murderer and a forger whose bad nature resisted all attempts at kindness—that will be my epitaph, I suppose. And yet it is simply and solely in order that she may be happy that I have condemned myself not only to death but to infamy. I wonder if there are many men in the world who would be capable of that!"

In all probability there are not many such persons; but their rarity is hardly to be deplored on behalf of the community at large.

With the first glimmer of dawn the camp was astir. Filmer's voice was heard outside in altercation with the cook, who had apparently overslept himself in an unwarrantable manner, and had allowed the fire to burn low; presently Francis came in and woke Dick, who, in his turn, shouted to Jacob to get up. It was intensely cold, and a bath in the neighbouring stream appeared so uninviting that that ceremony was dispensed with by all but three members of the party.

Dick laughed at the new-comer's ineffectual efforts to restore circulation by vigorous rubbing with a rough towel. "You'll soon get used to this kind of life, Jake," said he, "and you'll find it do you a world of good. By the middle of the day you'll be so hot you won't know what to do with yourself. Francis, the honour and pleasure of replenishing the larder will be yours this morning, and the sooner you start the better. Jake and I are going out presently in search of the picturesque."

Breakfast—a frugal meal—was disposed of before the sun was well up; Francis, with two companions, set out on foot; and soon after they had gone Dick and Jacob, mounting their horses, rode away in the opposite direction. For some time neither of them said much. Every now and again Dick pointed out some towering snowy peak, mentioning its name; once, when they heard the echoing sound of four shots, fired in quick succession, he observed: "That ought to mean one of them knocked over, anyhow;" and shortly afterwards the sight of a great herd of deer, grazing quietly within easy range, caused him to murmur regretfully: "What a thundering ass I was to come out with nothing but a whip in my hand!"

At length he reined up upon a grassy plateau where quantities of wild flowers were drinking in the sunlight that fell aslant upon them from the east, and said abruptly: "You may speak now, or shout, if you like, without being overheard. What have you to tell me?"

"Do you remember," asked Jacob, in a steady, level voice, "that just before you left England I took

the liberty of warning you that there were dangers to which every woman, no matter how good she may be, must be exposed when her husband ostentatiously neglects her? Do you remember telling me to mind my own business, and boasting that you made it a rule to trust everybody until you were deceived?"

"I don't remember boasting; I remember the conversation that you allude to," answered Dick, shortly. "Come to the point, please."

"What I dreaded then has happened, and nobody is to blame for it but yourself. I suppose that, if you had not deserted your wife, the thought of deserting you would never have entered into her mind. I don't know that she would desert you even now, if you returned to her; but I do know that you have lost the chance of ever gaining her love. From the first you did not care for her or you would have seen what every one else saw. Now it is too late. Cunningham has behaved badly, if you like—he is unworthy of her love, if you like; but that is of little consequence. The catastrophe is over. She loves him, and he knows it. More than that, he has very nearly persuaded her to leave her home with him."

With a touch of his heel Dick brought his horse close alongside of Jacob's, so that the two men's knees touched one another. "I think you are a liar," he said. "In any case I am sure that you came out here on purpose to tell me this, and therefore your story of last night was a lie. You will come back to England with me directly, and if I find that you have lied knowingly about my wife, I will break every bone in your skin."

Jacob met his eyes without flinching. "What I told you last night was untrue," he replied. "I did not wish—nor, I should think would you wish—that Mr. Francis should guess my errand. What I have said about Mrs. Herbert is no lie. But it does not much matter whether you believe me or not because I am not going back to England with you. Neither you nor I will see England again."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I will tell you. For years I have led as miserable a life as it is possible to lead. Perhaps you think it an absurd exaggeration for a man who has been given the best of food and clothing to say such a thing; but I suppose some men want a little more than food and clothing to reconcile them to life. Thanks to you, I have certainly had plenty to eat and drink; thanks to you also, I never had a friendly word addressed to me from the time that you know of until Mrs. Herbert came to Farndon. Probably you never noticed how good she was to me—you were not much given to noticing anything that she said or did—but she *was* good, and I was grateful to her, as I take it that only a man in my position could be. The very first time that I saw her I saw that she was not happy, and it was not long before I said to myself that if it should ever be in my power to make her happy I would do so, though it should cost me my life. I don't know whether I meant that quite literally at the time—one uses such phrases without thinking much about the significance of them—but I mean it literally now. From what I have seen and heard, I am convinced that she will never be happy unless she can marry

the man of her choice, and you will perceive that there is only one way of enabling her to do that."

Dick measured the speaker from head to foot with a look of wonder and contempt, not unmingled with amusement. Jacob's first announcement had startled, if it had not alarmed, him; but the effect of it was greatly weakened by this harangue, which he found it impossible to take seriously. "Are you threatening to blow my brains out?" he asked. "It strikes me, my friend, that you are a pretty good candidate for a strait-waistcoat. At least, that's the best excuse I can make for you. Now you'll oblige me by turning round and riding back to camp."

Jacob's answer was to draw his revolver from his breast pocket.

Quick as thought, Dick who had half expected this, closed with him, caught him round the body, and would have dragged him out of the saddle, had not Jacob been a horseman and a desperate man into the bargain. It was a mistaken method of attack, and it had a disastrous result. With one blow of the heavy whip which he carried, Dick might have broken the other's wrist, or at any rate forced him to drop his weapon; but he trusted too much to his own superior weight and strength; and although these must have told in another minute, there was not another minute to spare. Jacob was well aware of that. To take aim was out of the question, for his right arm, which had been forced upwards by Dick's shoulder was almost powerless; but he managed to turn the revolver round and fire. The shot apparently did not take effect; but the plunging of the terrified horses enabled him to

free himself a little. He rose in his stirrups, knowing that this was his last chance, threw himself forward, and, pressing the muzzle of the revolver against his antagonist's back, drew the trigger a second time. Instantly Dick's grip relaxed. Without a groan he fell upon his horse's neck and rolled heavily to the ground. Jacob himself being completely overbalanced, was also unhorsed, and the two affrighted beasts, freed of their riders, galloped off in the direction from whence they had come.

The thunder of their hoofs had died away before Jacob, who had been a little dazed by his fall as well as by the encounter which had ended so suddenly, rose to his feet and looked around him at the snow-capped mountains, the sunny slopes, and the valleys which lay in deep shadow. Stretched at his feet, silent and motionless, was the man who had rescued him from the workhouse, had given him home, money, and education, and who had been thus rewarded. In that unbroken stillness the voice that was heard by Cain seemed to resound in his ears—"What hast thou done?"

"For her sake!" he cried aloud in a voice of anguish—"for her sake!" And the mocking echo of his words was thrown back to him from the cliffs.

He turned hurriedly away, and taking from his pocket the photograph that Hope had given him, gazed at it for a few moments with eager, straining eyes. "Good-bye!" he murmured—"good-bye!" Then, a queer sort of smile curling his lip, "Good-bye, Jacob Stiles. It would have been better for you if you had never been born; but it seems that you had your work

to do in this world, and you have done it. Go out now into space!"

He raised the revolver to his head, pulled the trigger and dropped, stone dead, a few yards away from his victim, while a third shot woke the echoes of the lonely hills, puzzling those who heard it in the camp far away, and who knew that "the boss" had started on his ride without firearms.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOPE TAKES HER OWN WAY.

To be able to do nothing with perfect satisfaction is a distinct gift. Not many of us possess it, nor, for that matter, have cause to covet it; but it seems probable that so long as the world lasts there will be drones in every hive; and that the drones should have the power of accepting their situation with ease and grace is desirable for themselves and hurtful to nobody. Bertie Cunningham, to whom absolute idleness, far from being distasteful, was positively enjoyable, lingered on at Farndon, although the amusements provided for him there were neither many nor varied; and if he outstayed his welcome, he received no hint to that effect from his hostess.

One morning he was sitting in Dick's study, contentedly smoking a cigarette after breakfast, and wondering whether he ought to join Carry, whom he could see loitering on the terrace outside, when his letters and the newspapers were brought to him. He ran his eye over the former and tossed them aside; the days when the arrival of the post had been a bad moment for him were past and gone now. Then he picked up the *Times*, just to see whether anything particular had happened, before turning to the more attractive columns of the *Sportsman*. Something had indeed happened

something that made him bound out of his chair and drop the paper, with a cry of consternation. For, under the heading of "Latest Intelligence" was the following telegram, dated New York:—

"A terrible and mysterious tragedy is reported from the neighbourhood of Denver, Colorado. It appears that an Englishman, Mr. Herbert, who has been for some months past hunting in the Rocky Mountains, accompanied by a friend and attended by the numerous following of which these parties are usually composed, was joined a few days ago by a young artist named Stiles, with whom, it is stated, he was on terms of intimacy. Whether a dispute arose between these gentlemen, or whether, as seems more likely, Stiles was attacked by a sudden fit of insanity, will probably never be known; but circumstances leave no room for doubt that the latter, after shooting his companion with a revolver, committed suicide. They appear to have left the camp together on horseback; and their friends, alarmed by the return of the riderless horses, instituted a search for them which resulted in the discovery of their bodies, lying side by side at a distance of some miles from their starting-point. Mr. Herbert was still breathing, when picked up; but no hope is entertained of his recovery. Stiles, whose death-wound, it is said, was evidently self-inflicted, would seem to be identical with the Mr. Stiles whose pictures, representing a Roman chariot-race and the Ascot Cup day, were so much admired in last year's exhibition of the London Academy of Arts. Great sympathy is expressed for the family of Mr. Herbert, who was well known and popular on both sides of the

Atlantic, and who is understood to have been only a short time married."

Bertie, as soon as he had got over his first shock of horror and bewilderment, walked to the window, and beckoned to Carry, who presently joined him.

"What is the matter?" she asked, quickly, when she saw his grave face.

"I don't know how to tell you," he answered, "you had better read for yourself." And he handed her the *Times*, pointing to the paragraph quoted.

Carry's nerves never broke down under any circumstances, and her senses were always at her command in an emergency. She was fond of her brother—more so, perhaps, than she had ever given him reason to suppose—but it would have been foreign to her nature to indulge in lamentations while any active measures remained to be taken.

"This may not be true," she said. "The first thing to be done is to find out whether it is or not. Lock up the paper, so that Hope may not see it, and I will telegraph to Mr. Francis. You had better ride over to Windsor with the message. That will not waste much time, and it would never do to let the people at the Farndon post-office read it."

"Very well; I'll go round and get a horse saddled," answered Bertie.

But as he was crossing the hall he met the butler, who handed him a telegram. This proved to be from Francis, and ran as follows: "Herbert badly hurt through an accident. Extent of injuries not yet certain, but feared very serious. Consultation of surgeons to-

morrow. Will telegraph result. Do as you think best about breaking news."

With this confirmation of the evil tidings, Bertie returned to Carry, who agreed with him that it would be wiser and kinder to leave Hope in ignorance of what had happened until the report of the surgeons should be ascertained.

"There would be no object in keeping her in suspense for twenty-four hours," she said. "The whole affair is inexplicable to me. What reason could that wretch have had for murdering my brother?"

"Francis speaks of it as an accident," remarked Bertie.

"You or I would have done the same thing in his place. It sounds less shocking, and most likely he knows that poor Hope had taken a fancy to Stiles. We shall have a terrible scene when she is told, I am afraid. I don't think she is exactly wanting in courage; but I should say that she had very little self-control. We must keep her in the dark as long as we can."

But almost before this kindly intention had been expressed the speaker knew that to carry it out was no longer practicable. The door opened, and Hope, deadly pale, but betraying no other symptom of emotion, advanced towards the two well-meaning conspirators.

"I see that you know it all," she said, quietly. "Will you let me look at the *Times*, please? My maid brought me the *Morning Post* just now."

"What idiots we were not to think of that!" exclaimed Bertie involuntarily.

Hope glanced at him for a moment. "Did you

mean to conceal it from me?" she asked. "That would have been no kindness, and it would have made me lose precious time." She read the few sentences in the newspaper quickly, and then turned to the advertisement columns. "There will be two steamers for New York to-morrow," she said. "I suppose one or the other will be likely to have a spare cabin. I can go second class, if all the first are taken."

"You must not think of doing that," said Carry. "We have had a telegram from Mr. Francis—here it is—and he is to telegraph again to-morrow. At least do not start until we have heard again."

"Why?" asked Hope, sharply. "Why should I not start?"

"Because—it might be useless."

"Do you mean that he might be dead before I reached him? But you can't think that! Captain Cunningham"—with a sudden and piteous change of voice—"you don't think that Dick will die, do you?"

Bertie was silent, feeling that it would be more merciful to dishearten than to encourage her; but Carry, taking her sister-in-law's hand, said gently: "My dear Hope, you are not fit to undertake such a journey, and you may be sure that he would not wish it. There is nothing to be done but to wait as patiently as we can for more news, and if it is favourable, as of course it may be——"

"I cannot wait," interrupted Hope, who had already conquered her momentary weakness, "and I do not believe that Dick will die. I shall start by the early train to-morrow morning. If news comes later in the day you can telegraph it on to me at Liverpool or

Queenstown; but I will not run the risk of being detained here longer than is necessary."

And from this determination it was impossible to move her. When they found that she meant to take her own way, first Bertie, then Carry, and then both of them, wanted to go with her; but that she would not hear of. She refused even to take her maid, alleging—probably with truth—that such an attendant would be far more of an encumbrance than a help. Finally (for she herself was at last brought to see that she could not make the journey quite alone), it was arranged that she should be accompanied by the butler, a steady, stolid and not unintelligent Briton, who might be trusted to shoulder a way for his mistress through any ordinary difficulties, and who had been for many years in Dick's service.

Thus protected, she set off on the following morning, declining Bertie's proffered escort as far as Liverpool, and maintaining up to the last an aspect of cheerfulness which that young gentleman hardly knew whether to admire or to deprecate. "If you hear nothing before you sail, try to think that no news is good news," he said as he helped her into the railway-carriage.

"There will be no need for trying," she answered. "I am sure that Dick will get well again, and even if I were not sure, I would not allow myself to think anything else."

To many people the worst contingencies always appear the most probable, while others, more happily constituted, seem to be literally incapable of believing in a crushing disaster, so long as any room

remains for incredulity. Hope had as yet realised little more than that Dick was badly hurt and that she must go to him. Afterwards, when she had more leisure for reflection, she began to be very sorry for poor Jacob, who, she doubted not, had destroyed himself in a moment of madness. She recollected what good spirits he had been in at starting, and was convinced that what he had done could not have been premeditated. Her conclusions, in short, were precisely what Jacob had intended that they should be.

At Liverpool she found, as might have been anticipated, that the accommodation which she required was not to be had on board either of the outgoing steamers; but the ways of travellers to whom money is no object are generally made smooth for them, and the captain of one of the vessels was induced to cede his own cabin when informed of the urgency of the case. Brooks, the butler, was more disappointed than his mistress when the steamer left Queenstown without any telegram from Farndon having been brought on board. "I did not expect to hear," Hope said, in answer to the man's expressions of regret; "and you know, Mr. Herbert can hardly begin to mend for some days to come."

It was, perhaps, no bad thing for her that she was prostrated by sea-sickness immediately after encountering the long Atlantic swell, and that for three days and nights she was unable to lift her head from her pillow. When at length, dizzy and confused, she managed to crawl up on deck, she was informed that the passage was already half accomplished, and that the daily runs had been highly creditable. The pas-

sengers, who had discovered her name and errand, showed her a great deal of kindly attention, doing their best to keep her mind from dwelling upon painful thoughts, and assuring her that the voyage promised to be one of the shortest on record. Afterwards, when she recalled that time, it filled her with amazement to remember that she had talked, eaten, and slept, like everybody else. Impatient she certainly was, and anxious to reach Dick's bedside; but not once did she give way to despondency.

"You will see that we shall find good news waiting for us at New York, Brooks," she said to the butler, who answered, "Yes'm," and tried to look as if he agreed with her. Personally, he did not feel sanguine; but the event proved Hope to be a true prophet; for the pilot brought her a despatch from Francis, who had been informed by telegraph of her approach, and this, though somewhat short, was as satisfactory as could be desired. "Herbert is doing fairly well. Bullet extracted." More particulars would have been welcome; but it was impossible to grumble at so encouraging a report, and Hope triumphantly showed it to the sceptical Brooks, as well as to certain of her fellow-passengers, who had held aloof, eyeing her apprehensively while she perused it, but were now profuse in their congratulations.

It was only when she was seated in the train and speeding westwards that the excitement which had sustained her so long began to abate a little, and that, for the first time, it occurred to her to wonder whether Dick would be pleased to see her or not. She knew that if there was one thing that he disliked more than

another it was being made a fuss over, and it seemed quite within the bounds of possibility that he might consider her action precipitate and officious. Thus, having borne a real trouble admirably, she proceeded to make herself wretched over an imaginary one, as the habit of many women is.

Meanwhile, it must be owned that her arrival in Colorado was not looked forward to exactly with pleasure by the only person who as yet was aware of its imminence. The first thing that Francis did, after superintending the removal of his wounded friend to Denver, and hearing the discouraging verdict pronounced by local talent upon the case, was to find out the names and addresses of the two most eminent surgeons in the United States, and telegraph urgently to them. These gentlemen at once established the presence of two bullets in their patient's body. The first, which had lodged in the muscles of the back, was not a source of danger to life; but the position of the second was less easy to determine, and they declined at first to give an opinion as to whether and when it would be possible to remove it. They considered, however, that Mr. Herbert's fine constitution and healthy condition ought to give him a chance of pulling through, and that much Hope might have learnt by remaining another two days in England. As the result of further investigation and debate, an operation was decided upon which proved completely successful, so that at the time when Hope landed at New York her husband was virtually out of danger, and Francis, who, up to then, had had no time for rest or thought, was able to employ his mind in putting

together certain pieces of circumstantial evidence, and drawing his own deductions from the same.

It is needless to say that he had already been interviewed by many representatives of the press, all of them eager for information as to the causes of the affray which had so nearly proved fatal to his friend; but his answers had not been considered satisfactory. Upon being reproachfully reminded that the public took a keen and legitimate interest in this thing, he had replied that he could well sympathise with the public, since that was exactly the feeling which he himself experienced; but that he could only recommend the public to imitate him and be patient. "In short, gentlemen, I know no more about the matter than you do. Mr. Herbert is not at present in a state to be cross-examined; but if you will come back again when he has quite recovered, it will doubtless give him sincere pleasure to see you. And now, as I am sure that you must have many other affairs of importance to inquire into, I won't detain you any longer."

The result of this rather cavalier method of dealing with the Fourth Estate was the appearance in print of more than one description of Mr. Francis, in which his face, figure, and mode of pronouncing his own language were freely criticised, while he was reported as being "unable or unwilling" to afford any assistance to those who, in the discharge of their duty, had called upon him. Nevertheless, it was true enough that he knew little more than the interviewers, and even his suspicions were of the vaguest possible kind. Had he been foolishly and unwarrantably garrulous, he might have informed them that he had found a photograph

of Mrs. Herbert tightly clutched between the finger and thumb of Jacob Stiles's left hand, and also that, from inquiries which he had made in Denver, he had ascertained that the murderer had arrived in that town from Montana—a circumstance which, to his mind, was tolerably conclusive as to the question of premeditation; but that was all, or nearly all, the foundation that he possessed upon which to build up a theory; and Dick, though he had recovered consciousness immediately after his removal to camp, had volunteered nothing beyond a bare statement of the fact that he had been shot by Jacob.

While his friend's life seemed still to be trembling in the balance, Francis refrained from questioning him, and indeed from making any allusion to the circumstances which had brought him to such a pass; but he felt that it would be absurd, not to say impossible, to observe this reticence for ever; so one afternoon, when he was sitting by Dick's bedside, he attacked him point-blank with: "I say, Herbert, what did that fellow try to kill you for?"

"I suppose," answered Dick, staring placidly up at the ceiling, "that he didn't like me."

"Oh—you dismiss the suggestion of insanity, then?" said Francis, quickly.

"Much obliged for the implied compliment. I don't know that a man's disliking me is a proof of his sanity; but it certainly doesn't prove the reverse."

"It seems that he disliked himself, too, since he blew his own brains out after doing his best to murder you."

"So it seems. But I take it that we should all prefer committing suicide to being hung."

"Herbert, what was his motive? You must know."

"My dear fellow, when a man holds a pistol to your head there isn't time to go into these questions of detail."

"But didn't he go into them before he held the pistol to your head?"

"Oh, if you want to know how it happened, I'll tell you. We had a dispute, and I lost my temper with him and threatened to break every bone in his body if—well, if it turned out that something which he had asserted to be a fact was a lie. Then he produced his revolver and there was a scuffle and I was hit. That's all. If you insist upon it, I will tell you what the subject of the dispute was; but I'd rather not."

There was certainly no occasion for Dick to do violence to his inclinations in that respect. Francis said nothing more for a few minutes, and then asked casually: "Didn't Stiles profess a great attachment to Mrs. Herbert?"

"My wife was kind to him," answered Dick; "perhaps she understood him better than I did. He seems to have felt that he was unfairly treated by me. Well, he is dead now, poor beggar! Suppose we talk about something else."

"All right; only we mustn't talk too much about anything just at present. By-the-way, Herbert, would you like me to send for your wife?"

"On no account!" answered Dick, speaking with much more animation, and raising himself on his elbow

for an instant. "You haven't asked her to come, have you?"

"Oh no; I haven't asked her to come. I have been telegraphing to England, of course, and I suppose it is possible that she may come without being asked."

"I don't think she would do that," said Dick, consideringly; "nobody could say that it was her duty to do that. It would have been absurd for her to start when any moment might have brought her the news of my death; and now you can telegraph that I am all right, you know."

"I couldn't quite say that with truth."

"You can say that I shall be all right in a week or two, anyhow. Whatever you do, Francis, don't let her come out! After what I told you the other day you ought to understand that that would be a great mistake. I do hope you haven't taken it into your head that my being knocked over like this gives a fine opportunity for a reconciliation. I don't know how you may look at it; but it seems to me that to summon her here would be bringing a most unfair pressure to bear upon her."

"I have no intention of bringing any pressure to bear upon anybody," replied Francis, with a slight smile; "and I promise you that if Mrs. Herbert comes here it will not be my fault."

"I wonder what she *is* coming for!" he soliloquised, after he had left the room. "A little bit of show-off, I suppose, combined with a little remorse. The amazing thing to me is that any woman in her senses should throw over a man like Herbert, who adores her, for a *petit maître* like Cunningham, who cares so little about

her that he engages himself to another woman before her very eyes. But such is the way of them; they can't get on without being told that they are adored. It's easy enough to guess what that unfortunate fellow Stiles's errand was. No doubt he was in love with her, too, and came out here in a fit of jealousy and spite to tell her husband some story or other about her and Cunningham. I should doubt whether he started with a murderous intention; as far as he was concerned, it would have been more to the purpose to put an end to Cunningham than to Herbert or himself. And now the next thing will be that we shall have the cause of all this promiscuous shooting here, protesting her innocence, retarding Herbert's recovery, and wanting to nurse him—which, in all probability, she is utterly incapable of doing. I wonder whether she would turn back and go home again if I were to represent to her in very polite language that she wasn't wanted."

Thus it came to pass that when Hope reached her journey's end she met with a grave and rather chilling reception from Mr. Francis. "Your husband is making quick progress, Mrs. Herbert," he said; "that is, he is progressing as quickly as one can expect, considering that he has lost a great deal of blood and has been through a sharp operation. But as for your seeing him—well, really I don't quite know what to say about that. I must tell you that he knows nothing of your having left home. I thought it best to keep that fact to myself, because my instructions are that he is on no account to be agitated."

"Of course," answered Hope humbly, "I must not

ask you to do anything that might be bad for him; but would it not be possible to prepare him by degrees? Could you not suggest, for instance, that I should probably be anxious to be with him?"

"To tell you the truth, that is just what I did suggest, the other day; and he replied by expressing a very strong wish that you should not be sent for."

Hope's countenance fell; but she accepted her sentence without a murmur. "Then say no more to him about it," she returned, "and I will wait here until he is strong enough to see me without risk."

"But that may be weeks, Mrs. Herbert."

"I can't help it if it is months. At least I shall be at hand in case I am wanted, and I shall hear how he is every day."

This submissiveness was so unlike what Francis had expected that he could not bring himself to give Mrs. Herbert the "piece of his mind" with which he had several times favoured her in imagination. He even apologised a little: "One must be guided by the doctor's orders, you see," he said—a proposition to which she at once assented.

However, fortunately for Hope, the doctor did not prove himself Mr. Francis's ally on this occasion; for no sooner had he been presented to Mrs. Herbert than he declared that his patient, so far from being the worse, would be very much the better, for seeing her; and when Francis urged the expediency of delay and the danger of sudden shocks, he only laughed.

"I will take it upon me to say that your friend's nerves are about equal to standing that shock, sir," he

answered. "You come right in with me, Mrs. Herbert, and don't be afraid."

Thereupon he led Hope to the bedroom in which Dick was lying, pushed her gently through the door, which he closed behind her, and, returning to Francis, who was standing in the passage, remarked: "I reckon you'll find that a pretty fair prescription, sir."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" returned Francis snappishly. "Then perhaps you will look in again presently and see how it has worked. Don't say I didn't warn you, that's all."

CHAPTER XXII.

EXPLANATIONS ARE DISPENSED WITH.

HOPE paused on the threshold of the darkened room into which she had been thrust, her heart beating fast with apprehension. During the long journey from New York she had had time to draw a great many mental pictures of her meeting with her husband, all of which had been characterised by a complete absence of emotional display on both sides. It was not to be expected—so she had told herself—that Dick would be overjoyed at beholding her, nor must she be surprised if, at first, he should even give her to understand that she would have done better to remain at home. Nevertheless, the confirmation of her fears by Mr. Francis had been a grievous disappointment to her; and, the doctor's precipitate action having deprived her of all presence of mind, she stood motionless in the doorway, tremblingly awaiting the exclamation of surprise and displeasure which never came.

When her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she perceived that Dick had the best of reasons for keeping silence; and to see him sleeping soundly was only less of a relief to her than it would have been to receive his assurance that she was not unwelcome.

She stole across the room on tiptoe and looked down at his white face and pinched features with a feeling of intense sorrow and pity. Physical suffering

is by no means the worst misfortune which mortals have to bear; but, for some reason or other, it is that which excites by far the keenest and readiest sympathy. Moreover, in a woman's eyes there is always something especially pathetic in the spectacle of a strong man reduced to helplessness. As Hope gazed, her courage returned to her, and she ceased to dread her husband's probable rebuke. What if he should rebuke her? After all, it was her right to be where she was, and she had done nothing to forfeit that right. She rehearsed a little speech in which her case was set forth clearly and dispassionately. She would represent to Dick that somebody must nurse him, and that she believed herself to be doing only what was proper and usual in undertaking that necessary function. She would then assure him that he need have no fear of her bothering him with foolish questions, and that, so soon as he should be convalescent, she would be ready, if he desired it, to leave him.

But that speech was never uttered, nor was any one of the numerous scenes which Hope had passed through in fancy on her way from Farndon to Colorado enacted. For when Dick opened his eyes and saw who was standing beside him, his brain was still confused with sleep; so that, instead of looking annoyed or distressed or even astonished, he smiled contentedly and murmured: "Hope, my darling, have you come to me at last?"—just as any silly lover might have done who was not approaching his fortieth year, who did not hold common sense views on the subject of marriage, and who had not ample grounds for believing that a friendly esteem was the utmost that he could ever look for from the person addressed.

And Hope, for her part, forgot all her good resolutions, forgot that invalids must not be agitated and that a nurse who is fit to be called a nurse at all must retain her self-command, whatever may happen. Dropping on her knees by the bedside, she took Dick's wasted hand and kissed it again and again, while she sobbed out something incoherent and unintelligible, which was not on that account any the less easy to be understood.

And so everything was explained without an explanation. There is no better method of clearing away misunderstandings than this; nor, so long as the world goes round, will lovers have any occasion to use their tongues while they have eyes to speak with. Moreover, when they do begin to talk, they almost invariably talk rubbish; and this was exactly what Dick Herbert and his wife did for the space of a quarter of an hour by the clock. But when they became more or less rational, there was, of course, a great deal to be said; little, though, of what had lately seemed so important signified now. Hope got up, dried her eyes, and seated herself in the chair which Francis had vacated a short time before.

"Now I should like to know," said she radiantly—"you may call it impertinent curiosity if you choose—but I *should* like to know why you have deceived me all this time!"

"Never deceived anybody in my life," returned Dick, in the feeble voice which sounded so oddly coming from him. "I'm incapable of it."

"How can you say so? Haven't you told me, times out of number, that you didn't care one pin for me? But perhaps you didn't care—then."

"You are the only woman in the world whom I have ever loved, or been near loving."

"Oh, Dick! Have you forgotten telling me about that lady whom you proposed to, and who didn't return your affection?"

"Well, that *was* you. I should have thought you might have guessed that."

"I didn't guess it; and it made me very unhappy. How could I suppose that you meant such a thing, after your speaking to me as you had just done? I don't like to think of it even now."

"Nor do I, to tell you the truth," answered Dick; "we won't think about it any more. But this I will say for myself, that, however great a humbug I may have been, you were a worse one. That is, supposing that you have loved me all along. But I don't believe that you have. Come now, Hope, upon your honour—did you love me when you married me?"

Hope hesitated. "I think I must have loved you almost the first time that we met," she said, "but I didn't know it until long afterwards. I wasn't quite sure of it, until you had started for America. But *you* ought to have known it."

"I daresay! In the first place, I had your distinct assurance that you did *not* love me—mind you, I never made any such declaration to you—and in the second place, I had to look at probabilities. It was so likely—wasn't it?—that you should fall in love with an ugly old fellow——"

"Not ugly, Dick."

"Well, comparatively ugly and positively old. It was so likely that you should fall in love with a man

of that description, when you had another who was superlatively young and handsome at your feet."

Hope held up her hand imploringly. "Don't!" she exclaimed. "When you talk like that, you make me hate him; and one ought not to hate one's brother-in-law. Oh, Dick, how horrid it was of you not to believe me when I told you that I hated him!"

"I suppose," answered Dick musingly, "that it was as you say, rather horrid of me. I am sorry for having been so stupid, and it shall not occur again. Will that do?"

Hope laughed a little. "Yes, that will do; anything will do now. But what made you so determined to go away and leave me?"

"Ah, that's rather a complicated question; you must put yourself in my place if you want to understand why I was anxious to get out of England. But my motives were not entirely selfish, for all that. As I told you at the time, I thought it would be best for both of us that we should part for some months; and really it has been best for us, though not in the way that I meant. I am by no means sure that we shouldn't have gone on deceiving ourselves and one another to the end of the chapter, if it hadn't been for the bullet that is lying on the table over there."

Hope started up and examined the missile alluded to with shuddering interest. "Oh, if it had killed you!" she exclaimed presently.

"All things considered, I am very glad that it didn't. I shouldn't have said that an hour ago, though. My impression then was that the luck had gone rather against us both—certainly against you. You were

within something like an eighth of an inch of being a widow, I can tell you."

Hope made no rejoinder. After some time she said: "It makes me very sorry to think of poor Jacob. Of course he must have been quite out of his mind when he attacked you; but it was an odd sort of fatality that he should have met you at all; for he had no expectation of doing so when he left England."

"Had he not?"

"None whatever; he told me so himself. Indeed, he seems to have started without any definite plans. He was rather odd in his manner on the last evening; we all noticed it, but there was nothing at all to make one suppose that he could be losing his senses. I am afraid his was a very unhappy life. Do you know, he told me all about that trouble that he got into years ago, and it distressed me to hear the way in which he spoke of it. He seemed to think that you had never forgiven him and never would; and upon that point, at all events, I am sure that he was not quite sane. I was in hopes that when you came home I should be able to make you friends again."

"I doubt whether you would have succeeded."

Hope looked surprised. "But, Dick, surely you have forgiven him long ago."

"Yes; but there is a difference between forgiving a man and making a friend of him. Jacob Stiles was a bad lot; that's the long and the short of it. He is dead, and one would rather say nothing but good about him; but as a matter of fact he was a liar and a sneak."

"I can't agree with you there!" cried Hope, to whom this seemed very unjust.

"I know you can't, my dear," answered Dick, with a smile; "you think all the world is as honest as yourself, or capable of being made as honest; but, unhappily, that is not the case. At least, I don't think it is the case. Let us dismiss Jacob Stiles from our minds and agree to differ about him. We love one another well enough to be able to afford the luxury of an occasional difference of opinion."

The truth is that Dick's opinions were not easily changed; and to the present day his estimate of Jacob's character remains what he then declared it to be. The man, as he believed and believes, died with a lie upon his lips. He never cared to mention that to Hope, nor deigned to inquire whether there was the shadow of a foundation for it. Jacob's pretension of being actuated by a desire to set Hope free he dismissed as a lie like the other—a piece of theatrical bravado, by means of which a man of that stamp might not improbably seek to throw a halo over assassination. Hope herself could not, from the nature of the case, do full justice to the memory of the man who died for her. A lunatic who has done his best to murder the person whom you love most on earth is not precisely one whom it is easy to recall with tender feelings; and indeed in these latter times Mrs. Herbert had surrendered much of her independence of judgment, having insensibly fallen into the habit of adopting her husband's views (which, to be sure, have always a basis of sound common sense to recommend them), and being disposed to think that he must be right, even when at first sight he might appear to be wrong. It is probably just as well for her that she should hold that conviction, and it is certainly well that she has

been spared the pain of knowing that a stupid and purposeless crime was once committed for her sake.

For the moment, she was quite willing to adopt Dick's suggestion and dismiss Jacob Stiles from her mind. She and her husband had many things of far greater importance to say to one another; and these occupied so long a time in the telling that Francis, who had been impatiently awaiting in the next room the end of this interminable interview, judged it imperative upon him at last to come in and put a stop to it.

It was a very pretty little picture that met his eye when he entered—the young wife sitting by the bedside, holding her husband's hand in both her own, while the sick man, with parted lips and colour a little higher, perhaps, than the doctor would have approved, was eagerly listening to her—and it is melancholy to be obliged to record that the only comment which this scene drew from Francis was the unspoken one of: "By George! she's talked him over then, after all."

Dick raised himself on his elbow and said: "Francis, old man, come here; I have something to say to you."

"Won't it keep till to-morrow?" asked Francis. "It seems to me, by the look of you, that you have been talking too much already."

"Well, what I was going to say is soon said; I only wanted to tell you that it is all right."

"I am delighted to hear it," answered Francis a little stiffly.

"That, I suppose, means that you don't believe it. What an ass you are, Francis! I shouldn't say it was all right if it wasn't; but I am too tired to tell you the

whole story. Hope, do you think you can make this pig-headed fellow understand? You and he will have to see a good deal of each other for the next week or two, I expect, and if you could manage to make friends it would be more comfortable for you both. I don't think you like him very much at present; but you will, when you know him better; and you needn't hesitate to speak openly to him about—about—you and me, you know, because he has heard already from me all that there was to hear."

This speech was not very well calculated to set either Hope or Francis at ease; nor, in spite of the good advice bestowed upon them, did they at once become friends. In the course of the evening Hope explained in a few words that certain clouds which had arisen between her and her husband had now been finally dispersed; to which Francis, more politely than truthfully, responded that he had always expected that happy consummation to be reached sooner or later. The subject was then dropped by mutual consent, and was not recurred to.

Since those days Hope has learnt to appreciate the sterling qualities which distinguish Mr. Francis, and is always ready to extend a warm welcome to him when he visits Farndon; but for the time being, she desired nothing more ardently than that he should take himself off and leave her alone with Dick. As for him, he had sufficient tact to perceive the advisability of that course. He only remained at Denver until his friend's convalescence was thoroughly established; and when he announced his speedy departure for England, Dick—nothing if not candid—answered cheerfully: "All right, old chap, you must be awfully bored here,

and, under the circumstances, you know, you're rather a bore to us. Don't mind my saying so, do you?"

And probably the writer and readers of this narrative would do well to imitate the discreet Francis. Once upon a time, as everybody knows, there was a fox who, having lost his tail in a trap, endeavoured to persuade himself and other foxes that he was far more comfortable without it; and even so, many of us who are no longer in a position to waste our time as lovers do are wont to smile at youthful follies and affect to prefer the spectator's more dignified part. But the pretence takes in nobody. Looking on is dull work; we should assuredly not be lookers-on if we could help it; nor will any fox deprive himself voluntarily of the appendage wherewith Nature has gifted him. Happy those who at Dick Herbert's time of life can still be young and still look forward into the future through the rose-coloured glasses of which we all once possessed a pair, but which we are apt, somehow or other, to mislay before even youth itself is well over. Let us leave this reunited couple to enjoy the spring weather in remote Colorado, with the consolatory assurance that whatever they may have to say to one another can be of interest only to themselves.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

To be in a fair way towards recovery is one thing, and to be in a state to take a long railway journey, cross the Atlantic, and give away your sister in marriage, is quite another. Dick's restoration to health proved a more tedious business than had at first been anticipated; the summer was far advanced before he was able to return home, and a postponement of their wedding-day was found necessary by Miss Herbert and Bertie Cunningham, who might certainly expect, if ever any couple had a right to do so, that they would escape the danger which is said to threaten those who marry in haste. But at length they were duly united in the presence of a large concourse of friends and relatives; and, if appearances may be relied upon, they have neither repented of their bargain yet, nor are likely to repent of it at any future time. The first thing necessary to ensure contentment here below is to know what you want, and the second is to be satisfied with it when you have got it. Bertie Cunningham and his wife may be considered to have fulfilled these conditions. The former resigned his commission on his marriage, and has been doing nothing with great assiduity and complete satisfaction to himself ever since. His wife's estate in Yorkshire needs a great deal of looking after, he says; and he looks after it by riding in a leisurely

fashion over parts of it when he happens to be at home. For the rest, he has got together a nice lot of hunters; his means permit him to take a Scotch moor every year; and as he is most amiable and well-to-do, he is never likely to want for friends of both sexes. Whether his wife is ever jealous of him it would be difficult to say. She has, at any rate, the wisdom not to be too exacting, and he is always careful to consult her wishes and convenience. Upon one occasion he confided to Mrs. Pierpoint his belief that Carry, after all, was better suited to a man of his habits than a certain lady with whom he would once have considered it the summit of earthly bliss to spend his life, and whom he still greatly admires. "The fact is," said he, "that she would have been too good for the likes of me."

"And pray, do you imagine that Carry is not too good for you?" Mrs. Pierpoint rejoined.

"No; but I am good enough for her. Or, at least, she thinks so, which comes to the same thing. She is satisfied with the simple pleasures that satisfy you and me. She is fond of hunting, she is fond of society, she doesn't object to the smell of smoke—and so, you see, we manage to hit it off tolerably well."

Mrs. Pierpoint will probably be absent both from society and from the hunting-field for some little time to come, being in deep mourning for the intemperate Marmaduke, who died somewhat suddenly a few months ago—"of general debility," to borrow the charitable phrase employed by the doctor who attended him. As, during his lifetime, he lost no opportunity of bringing misery and shame upon his wife, it is only in the nature of things that his decease should have left her inconsolable.

Of the other persons who have been more or less concerned with the course of this story it is pleasant to be able to give an excellent report. If there is a woman in England who is not only fortunate and happy, but actually admits herself to be so, it is Lady Jane Lefroy. Only the other day she married her second daughter to a young man of the highest position, character, and abilities, and is inclined to take no small credit to herself for the signal success which has crowned her efforts on behalf of the three maidens whom she had on her hands at the time when she was first introduced to the reader.

"You see, my dear," she could not resist saying to Hope, not long ago, "I was quite right in choosing Dick Herbert for you. I was always convinced that he was *the* man to be your husband, though you would not allow it. Another time you will know better."

To this boast Hope could only reply that, while confessing the justice of her aunt's intuitions, she was not eager to have a second opportunity of profiting by them.

"Jane Lefroy," says Lady Chatterton, with a sniff, "is as proud of her luck as if she had deserved it. Her niece happened to be beautiful, and her daughters had a fair share of good looks, for which I am sure they were not indebted to her; so, as I took them by the hand, they were able to marry well. How they have got on and will get on with their respective husbands is another question."

But even Lady Chatterton cannot help worshipping success, and she has taken to treating her old friend with considerably more respect than of yore.

Mr. Lefroy threatens to retire from Parliament at

an early date. The House of Commons, he says, is no longer what it used to be. A man doesn't meet his friends there, and the iniquitous folly of the views held upon the subject of land by certain right honourable gentlemen opposite is enough to make decent people hesitate about even sitting in the same Assembly with such mischievous and ignorant prigs. "As I am speaking privately, and cannot be called to order, I shall not withdraw the expression 'mischievous and ignorant prigs.' If that is the sort of thing that passes for statesmanship nowadays, all I can say is, the sooner we imitate the Americans, and leave politics to the professional politicians, the better." It is said, however, that the leaders of Mr. Lefroy's party are most unwilling to lose his support in the House, and that he has yielded—at all events, provisionally—to their solicitations.

When Tristram heard of the drama which had been enacted in Colorado he was greatly agitated and distressed, feeling that he ought to have foreseen and might have prevented it. His first impulse was to go straight down to Farndon and see Hope; but luckily he did not act upon this, and the subsequent course of events determined him to keep his own counsel. No good purpose, assuredly, could have been served by his demonstrating, as he might have done, that Jacob had attempted Mr. Herbert's life in cold blood, and he did not desire to affix a stigma to the memory of a young artist who had succeeded in enlisting his sympathies. As being in some sort Jacob's executor, he felt bound to give effect to the testator's last wishes, though with some misgivings as to the good taste of so doing. He accordingly hired a gallery in Bond

Street, where he exhibited the painting of Cain during the ensuing season, and where it drew immense crowds.

The criticism of the experts was such as might have been anticipated. Full justice was done to the merits of the composition; the genius of its author was extolled and his premature demise lamented; a good deal was said about the "lurid light" cast upon the subject chosen by "circumstances which will be fresh in the memory of our readers;" and one writer went so far as to aver that it was "impossible to study closely the expression given to the countenance of Cain in this striking picture without a painful conviction that the hand which painted it was that of one already attacked by the first symptoms of homicidal mania."

Nothing more than this was required to call forth from Tristram—who happened to have held much the same opinion himself until he saw it in print—a torrent of scorn and derision. "That's your art-critic all over!" he exclaimed. "Homicidal mania, indeed!—homicidal grandmother! Because, forsooth, a man who undertakes to paint a murderer makes him look like a murderer he is a homicidal maniac! 'Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat.' I suppose the next thing we shall hear will be that Leonardo da Vinci was attacked by the first symptoms of kleptomania because he could give a lifelike representation of Judas Iscariot. What, I wonder, ought poor Stiles to have made Cain look like in order to prove his own sanity and morality—a Methodist parson?"

But Tristram took up quite another tone when discussing this matter with one commentator upon Jacob's

last effort, who had visited the gallery at the close of the season, and had left it with a grave, sad face.

"It is a distressing picture," Hope said, "but I am glad to have seen it—glad and sorry. It makes my heart ache for poor Jacob; and yet it is a satisfaction to me to get rid of the doubt that has sometimes tormented me as to whether he was really as innocent as I thought him at first. He had a curiously strong feeling of resentment against my husband, and for himself I know that he valued life very little. But after looking at that picture, I am certain that he must have been deranged. One sees in every line of it how intensely he realised the situation, and there is nothing far-fetched in the idea that it ended by affecting his brain. You agree with me, don't you?" she added eagerly.

"I do not believe," replied Tristram, "that the poor fellow was responsible for his actions. I should like you to keep a corner for him in your kind heart, Mrs. Herbert, because I am persuaded of one thing, and that is that he would never willingly have done you an injury."

"Poor Jacob!" sighed Hope; "he did me no injury. On the contrary, he did me a great kindness, without intending it; for if he had not tried to kill Dick, I should not have gone to America; and perhaps, if I had not gone to America——"

She left her sentence unfinished, but Tristram had no difficulty in filling up the hiatus. He understood quite well that Jacob by failure had achieved success, and that the luckless young fellow's death had, after an unexpected fashion, brought happiness to her for whose sake he had been content to die.

Happy she undoubtedly is—happy in her home, in her husband, and now also in her child; for the birth of a son and heir has recently been made the occasion of great rejoicings on Mr. Herbert's estates. She has not abandoned her artistic tastes, and devotes a certain portion of each day to work in the new studio which Dick has caused to be built for her. It is scarcely likely that she will ever rise above the level of an exceptionally clever amateur; but she still cherishes a secret ambition of some day or other seeing a work of hers hung upon the walls of the Royal Academy, and in this Tristram does not fail to encourage her—not, indeed, because he attaches much value to the desired distinction, but because, as he says, it would be a pity that she should not have something left to hope for.

THE END.

It is a well-known fact, that the people of this country are not only more intelligent, but more patriotic, than those of any other nation. They are more attached to their rights, and more determined to defend them. They are more conscious of the value of their property, and more careful to protect it. They are more sensible of the importance of education, and more anxious to acquire it. They are more fond of liberty, and more ready to sacrifice to it. They are more generous, and more forgiving. They are more brave, and more courageous. They are more honest, and more upright. They are more industrious, and more enterprising. They are more cheerful, and more contented. They are more virtuous, and more worthy. They are more useful, and more valuable. They are more patriotic, and more devoted. They are more loyal, and more true. They are more brave, and more courageous. They are more honest, and more upright. They are more industrious, and more enterprising. They are more cheerful, and more contented. They are more virtuous, and more worthy. They are more useful, and more valuable. They are more patriotic, and more devoted. They are more loyal, and more true.

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May 1887.

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